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Jan. 18	at Iowa	7 p.m.
Jan. 24	at Missouri	7 p.m.
Jan. 26	Alabama	2 p.m.
Feb. 1	Oklahoma	7:30 p.m.
Feb. 7	at Iowa State	7 p.m.
Feb. 14	at Ohio State	6 p.m.
Feb. 23	Masters Classic	2 p.m.
March 1	at Penn State	6 p.m.
March 14	at Michigan	6:30 p.m.
March 23	Iowa State	2 p.m.
March 29	at Big 12 Championships (Columbia, Mo.)	7 p.m.
April 12	at NCAA Regionals (TBA)	TBA
April 24-26	NCAA Championships (Lincoln, Neb.)	TBA

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Looking For New Answers

New coaches, terminology, philosophies should make it an interesting spring



Brian Hill

OUR APRIL EDITION annually lists some of the key questions entering spring football.

Last year's preview posed the question: "Can it be Fixed?" in regard to the confidence of the Nebraska defense, which had given up 99 points in the last two games the previous season.

Although the defensive performance was only part of the problem during last year's disappointing 7-7 season, there is still a long way to go. The question in this year's preview is only slightly different: "Can the Blackshirts Regain Their Pride?"

The restructured coaching staff, including new defensive coordinator Bo Pelini, is starting from scratch in many ways. Obviously, not everything can be fixed in the 15 practices that make up the spring session. But many things will be different when the 2003 Huskers hit the field March 26 for the first workout leading up to the April 19 Spring Game.

You can read about some of the new terminology and new philosophies in this edition of *Huskers Illustrated*. Contributing editor Mike Babcock has a position-by-position breakdown of who's back and who's not.

Our spring preview package includes profiles of tight end Matt Herian, who burst onto the scene with four touchdown catches as a true freshman, and

rush end Benard Thomas, who can't wait to get started after a frustrating redshirt season.

As our cover photo illustrates, we've also got baseball. A crowd of 2,979 braved temperatures that barely topped freezing as Nebraska opened its home season March 7 with a pair of afternoon victories over Wisconsin-Milwaukee, a team it beat in last year's NCAA regionals. The third game of the series fell victim to the weather.

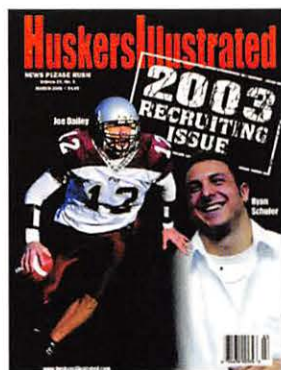
Junior left-hander Aaron Marsden, last year's Big 12 Newcomer of the Year, is the subject of our baseball profile. With the departure of All-American Shane Komine, Marsden has become the Huskers' No. 1 starter. Unfortunately, the Huskers lost No. 2 starter Brian Duensing for an extended period when he suffered an elbow injury in the second game against Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

The Huskers, who were rated as high as 12th after a 9-2 start, appear to have the pitching depth to overcome the injury, but it still hurts.

Nebraska's basketball team really never did recover from the loss of sophomore guard Jake Muhleisen in the Big 12 opener at Kansas. We have a look at Muhleisen and his battle to recover from a fractured hip socket.

As usual, there is much, much more, including a look at the changes to the football schedule. The shift of a game at Southern Mississippi from Sept. 20 to Sept. 25 gives Nebraska an extra five days between its two toughest non-conference games. After the Huskers face Penn State in Lincoln on Sept. 13, they are idle until they head to Hattiesburg, Miss., for their first road game, an ESPN Thursday national broadcast.

Those are games three and four on the schedule, maybe providing enough time to answer some of the questions about the 2003 Huskers. ■



ON THE COVER

Shortstop Joe Simokaitis turns a double play in Nebraska's home-opener vs. Wisconsin-Milwaukee March 7. The Huskers swept a double-header 8-0 and 9-6 to improve to 9-2. The third game of the series was canceled because of cold weather. Photo by Scott Bruhn.

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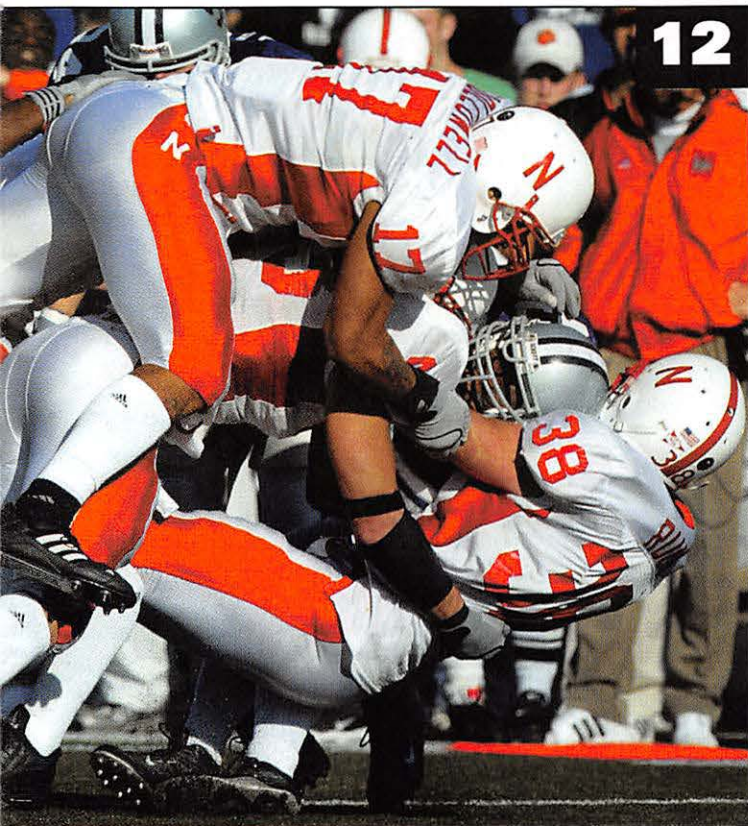
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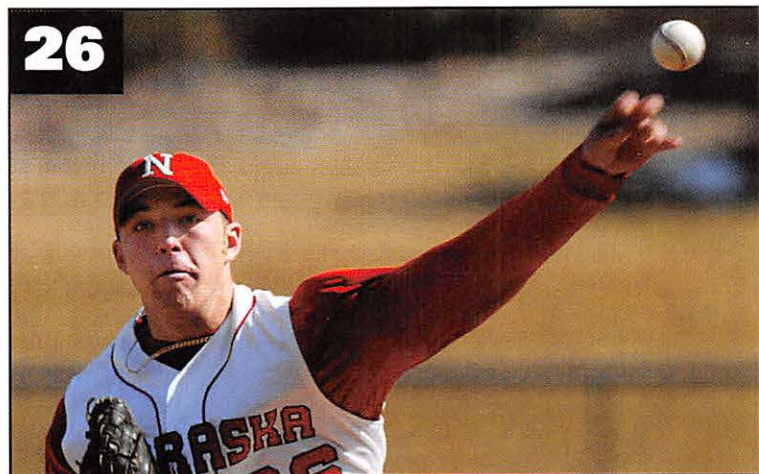
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The May issue will be mailed Monday, April 28. Check for updates at www.huskersillustrated.com.

Strange Feeling

On the Friday night before Nebraska's game at Penn State, Jay Moore went home to Elkhorn, Neb., to watch his high school football team play — and answer what was for him an embarrassing question.

Hadn't the Cornhuskers left for State College? And if so, why wasn't he with them?

Yes they had left, he replied, without him.

No, they hadn't forgotten him. Typically, redshirts don't travel, except to bowls. Acknowledging that "was tough," Moore said recently. "I had to swallow my pride a little just because I was always the top guy. It stinks to tell people that I'm redshirting, that I'm not good enough to play this year."

Ability isn't necessarily the determining factor in whether a true freshman plays, of course. Being relegated to the scout squad is often a function of depth at a particular position.

Moore's position is rush end, even though he played linebacker on defense and running back on offense in high school. His most notable accomplishments were as a running back.

He rushed for 1,742 yards and scored 31 touchdowns as a junior and 822 yards and 16 touchdowns as a senior, before an ACL injury ended his season after only five games.

Nebraska recruited him as a tight end or rush end, giving him the choice when he reported. He picked rush end because "I thought I might have a better chance of playing as a true freshman."

The top five rush ends last season were experienced, but three of them were seniors. So Moore thought he might get an early start and earn some playing time as a reserve.

The redshirt decision wasn't made until a couple of games into the season. But by the end of two-a-day practices, "I knew there was probably a greater chance I would," he said.

"It was pretty much written in stone that I was going to redshirt."

He wasn't alone in that, far from it.



Rush end Jay Moore's first season as a Cornhusker was "definitely a learning experience."

Ten other freshmen in his scholarship recruiting class of 15 were held out to preserve a season of eligibility and allow them to mature physically.

Matt Herian, David Horne, Mark LeFlore and Fabian Washington played. The others found themselves relegated to the scout team, for the most part, during practice. Moore spent some time with the second team, after Chris Kelsay was sidelined by a nagging hamstring pull.

"But I would say about 75 percent of the time I was on the scout team," said Moore.

Scout-team duty "gets real discouraging because you're not used to it," he said. "You never had to do it in high school. You never had to deal with that. It was definitely a learning experience."

Among the things he learned was the importance of the scout team. Early in the season, the defensive scout team wasn't providing the offense a good look, Moore said. "After the Penn State game, we kind of talked about how we needed to

start doing more and more.

"We set up different stations, where it was more game-like. It was like a game situation except we weren't tackling. Every station became that way. It got real physical."

It was frustrating when the hard work didn't pay off. "You're busting your butt play in and play out, then on Saturday the offense just looks like crap," he said. "Geez, the scout team isn't doing their job. You know you're trying to do everything you can. But in the end, it wasn't working."

About all you can do is "try to make sure things don't happen like that again," he said.

Now when Moore goes home to Elkhorn he has to field a different question.

"Everywhere you go, it's, 'What do you think of the coaching changes?' I tell people the same thing every time. 'Well, they're all going to be good. They're really good coaches,'" he said.

He has tried to remain "up-beat" during the coaching shake-up that followed the end of Nebraska's worst season since 1961. "Everybody's kind of on an even surface here, learning a whole new defense," he said. "I'm excited to start working more with Coach (Bo) Pelini."

Moore has a new position coach, sort of. Jeff Jamrog, who has coached the defensive tackles, will work with the rush ends as well. So there's a familiarity that other positions lack.

Moore has yet to suit up for a game. Last season, he would sit with other redshirts in the student section, trying to be as inconspicuous as someone 6-foot-4 and 265 pounds can be.

"You hear people screaming and at times, you just want to say, 'You have no idea what you're talking about, so just keep all of your comments to yourself,'" he said. But he didn't.

Students who knew he was a football player often asked why he wasn't out there.

"It kind of got old after a while," he said. ■

FITTING HONOR

In 29 seasons at Nebraska, Milt Tenopir saw six of his players receive the Outland Trophy. Now he has one of his own.

The Bugeaters, a group of Omaha businessmen and Husker supporters, had an actual Outland Trophy made, and former NU Coach Tom Osborne presented it to the recently retired offensive line coach at a banquet March 8 in Omaha.

In addition to Osborne and former defensive coordinator Charlie McBride, a number of former Huskers, including Outland winners Aaron Taylor, Zach Wiegert and Will Shields, were on hand to honor Tenopir. Other former players in attendance were Tionu Fonoti, Erik Wiegert, Terry Connealy, Adam Treu, Rik Bonness, Jerry Murtaugh, Bill Bobbora, Jim Wanek, Doug Glaser, Scott Frost, Roger Fitzke, Tom Haase, Matt Hoskinson, Mark Antonietti, Fred Pollack and Matt Vrzal.

"Milt was so surprised. It was a great evening," said Steve Hayes, a member of the Bugeaters.

IN MEMORIAM

George Kelly's time at Nebraska was brief. He was an assistant football coach from 1961 to 1968, working with the defensive line. But he had a significant impact on the program, not only recruiting Frank Solich but also having a hand in establishing the Blackshirt tradition.

Kelly was the first to distribute the black pullover practice jerseys that would become symbolic of the Cornhuskers' defensive tradition during the mid-1960s.

"Honestly, it was an accident of availability," Kelly once said.

Then-Coach Bob Devaney wanted contrast jerseys to identify defensive players during practice. And Mike Corgan, the offensive backs coach, was responsible for purchasing the jerseys at a local sporting goods store. The black pullovers hadn't sold well, so Corgan got a bargain.

Kelly left Nebraska in 1969 to return to his alma mater, Notre Dame, where he spent 17 years as assistant under Ara Parseghian, Dan Devine and Gerry Faust.

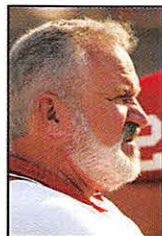
Kelly died in early March, at age 75.

BACK COACHING

Former Cornhusker football assistants Craig Bohl and George Darlington have landed jobs for next season. Bohl is now the head coach at NCAA Division II North Dakota State, while Darlington will coach the outside linebackers and safeties at Division I-A Marshall University.

Bohl coached the defensive backs at North Dakota State in 1984. Darlington, a West Virginia native, is returning home. The Marshall campus is located in Huntington, W. Va.

Both also will be paid by Nebraska through June of 2004. ■



Milt Tenopir



George Kelly

QUICK HITS

What's Happening In Nebraska Athletics?

IN THE FUTURE, BUT NOT NOW

The Nebraska baseball team had scheduled Arkansas for this season. But that changed when Dave Van Horn left to become the Razorbacks' head coach.

"Our kids didn't need that pressure. His kids didn't need that pressure. Not this year," said Mike Anderson, Van Horn's successor. "In the future, yes, we want to play Arkansas. That would be fun. I think it would be a good experience for myself and Dave and our coaching staff."

He and Van Horn "talk quite a bit," Anderson said.

"He's still a dear friend, a good friend of ours, the program."

But a game between the programs this season would have been inappropriate, according to Anderson. "If we say this is for the kids, they don't need that right now," he said.

Senior Jeff Leise said the Cornhuskers "would have loved to play" Arkansas. "But that's all right. It's no big deal. Hopefully, we'll be able to eliminate them this year at the end of the season."

SERIOUS SERIES TALK

Back-to-back trips to the NCAA College World Series, the first in school history, have given the Cornhuskers the confidence to talk about a third in a row. "I wouldn't say it's (discussed on) a daily basis, but I would say it's something we talk about," said Anderson. "It's a team goal."

"I know a lot of people have expectations for us, the fans of Nebraska, our parents, our families, they all have expectations for where we should be. I can tell you this, I think our expectations within our team, within our staff, are probably higher than (that of) the typical fan. So we understand that it's something that should be talked about . . . something that should be part of what we do."

And the goal goes beyond just getting to Omaha. "From the recruiting end to the student-athlete end to everything we do, trying to win a national championship is something we want to try to do," Anderson said. "If this is not the year, great. We're going to continue to work at that."

The memory of riding on a bus back to Lincoln after going two-and-out last season is still fresh for junior catcher John Grose. "It was just the worst feeling I've ever had," he said.

"This year, I won't be happy unless I'm dog-piling on that mound. That's been our goal and that's why we're working so hard. Everybody knows how hard we have to work."

Players such as Leise and Jamie Rodrigue have dealt with the disappointment of going two-and-out twice. "That's what you're left with in the off-season," said Leise. "That's the memory we have, going 0-2 in Omaha. We'd love to get back there this year and hopefully have a little more success."

"I'd love to bring back a national championship to Nebraska."

ALL ABOUT THE TEAM

Former Cornhusker Darin Erstad, a member of the World Series champion Anaheim Angels, met with the baseball team during a visit to Lincoln the week after the World Series.

Erstad, the first pick in the major league draft, spent an hour with the Cornhuskers and "not one time did he talk about himself," Anderson said. "You talk about a team person, a team player. Guys would ask questions about Darin Erstad, and Darin would talk about other teammates."

Erstad continues to represent Nebraska in the major leagues.

"When we talk about team at the University of Nebraska, we try to over-emphasize that in our baseball program. To have Darin for an hour long sit with our guys and talk only about other people and about their experiences, that's a pretty good role model," said Anderson.

'COACH A'

Anderson is a players' coach, while Van Horn tended to be more distant, according to Grose. "I'm not saying that Coach Van Horn wasn't a great guy, but I respect everything 'Coach A' does," he said.

"When he gets us up in our huddles, you know you're going to learn something that day, you know that he's going to teach you something about life outside of baseball that you can take on with you for the rest of your life. He's a great guy all around. I'm so motivated by the things he says."

That doesn't mean Anderson lacks discipline, however.

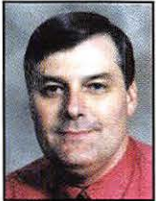
"If he thinks we're not working hard, he's definitely not afraid to jump on us," Grose said. ■



Mike Anderson

Athletic Family

His father was a basketball standout, but Shane Siegel's calling is football



Mike BABCOCK

BOB SIEGEL STANDS to the left of the late Joe Cipriano in the color photograph on the cover of the 1976-77 Nebraska basketball media guide. Allen Holder is to Cipriano's right.

Siegel and Holder are identified as senior forwards on the cover's reverse side.

The bright hardwood floor at the Bob Devaney Sports Center arena is behind them, though it has not yet been named in honor of Devaney, athletic director and Hall of Fame football coach.

The Cornhuskers played their first game there on Nov. 27, 1976, losing to Iowa, 71-57.

The 6-foot-7, 215-pound Siegel, a starter the previous two seasons, would score nine points against the Hawkeyes. He is a "rugged" player, according to the capsule in the guide. He has a serious look, staring to the side of the photograph, easily dated by short basketball trunks and plain sneakers.

Shane Siegel resembles his dad, without question. And he has inherited his father's athleticism. Shane, 6-3 and 215 pounds, is among the best athletes on the Nebraska football team.

Bob Siegel also played football at Fairbury, Neb., High School. But he was such a talented basketball player that he was invited to compete in the prestigious Dapper Dan Classic following his senior year.

The difference is, Shane didn't channel his athleticism into basketball, not at all. He didn't even play in high school. And neither did his brothers, Stuart and Scott. "It's kind of crazy," he said.

"I think we were all suited to be football players. That was our calling."

Stuart walked on at Nebraska in 1999, but his career was cut short by a knee injury. Scott, a senior at Grand Island, Neb., High, has announced his intention of walking on in the fall.

Scott, 6-0, 215 pounds, plans to play fullback. "He's a good athlete and a hard worker," said Shane. "So there's no doubt in my mind he can play here."

Growing up, Shane went to Nebraska basketball games, which were "fun." But football games were more fun. "We went to every home game, basically, since I was 6 or 7 years old," he said. Like so many boys who have grown up in the state, he imagined himself playing there one day.

He is 20 years old now, and preparing for his third sea-

son at Nebraska. He was a cornerback last season, as a redshirted freshman, the "penny" in certain alignments, replacing the rover in passing situations. "When I tell people I play 'penny,'" he said, "they're kind of like . . ."

Nebraska's coverage packages can be confusing for spectators.

"Defensive backs are scrambling, trying to see what personnel is in the game, what numbers to look for," said Siegel. "You've got the play coming up in a couple of seconds, so it's crazy just trying to get the right people on and off the field and getting the coverage called at the same time."

Avoiding the confusion requires "a lot of repetition at practice," he said. "You really have to communicate with one another if you want the whole thing to work."

"You really have to be alert, especially in the secondary."

Siegel walked on intending to play free safety, which he did last spring after redshirting. But the coaches moved him to cornerback in order to get him on the field, to gain experience.

Cornerback is a little less complicated than safety. Mike Brown, who established the standard by which Cornhusker rovers are measured, played cornerback as a true freshman.

Siegel will play strong safety in a new system this spring, a position switch with which he is pleased. "Corner was OK, but I think with my size, I'm better suited to safety," he said.

He earned all-state honorable mention as a linebacker in high school, and "I've always been a lot more comfortable (at Nebraska) as a safety," he said.

He also will have a scholarship this spring, an indication that he figures in the plans.

Shane and brothers Stuart and Scott were "pretty competitive" in pick-up basketball games in the driveway of the family's home. But none of them played high school basketball.

That's curious, considering their father is in the Nebraska Basketball Hall of Fame. But as with his other sons, "he would support whatever I did," Shane said.

"He really wasn't trying to influence me to go either route."

When the photograph for the 1976-77 media guide cover was taken, Bob Siegel might have been imagining that a son would follow him at Nebraska some day, as a basketball player.

And that still could happen. When Sam, Shane's youngest brother, gets to high school, "he'll play basketball, I think," said Shane. "He'll probably play both." ■



Shane Siegel played in all 14 games as a red-shirt freshman.

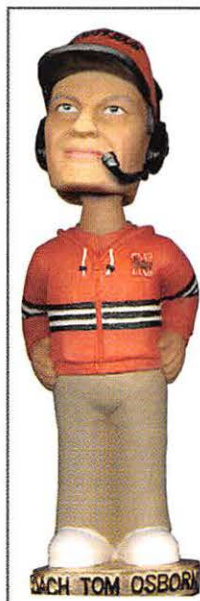
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HUSKERS ILLUSTRATED 9

Taking A Chance

'I've loved my time here and felt like it was something I couldn't give up'



**Terry
DOUGLASS**

NO MATTER WHAT transpires this season, Jeff Leise doubts he'll ever regret his decision to return to Nebraska.

"It's something where I had to make a decision last year and live with it, and I haven't looked back on it one bit," said Leise, a senior center fielder. "Definitely, I think I haven't accomplished all my goals here and would love to bring back a national championship to Nebraska."

Truly, history might show that one of Nebraska's biggest victories for the 2003 season came last summer when Leise revealed that he planned to return for his senior season, despite being selected in the seventh round of the major league baseball amateur draft by Anaheim. The decision made the 5-foot-10, 165-pound Omaha native the highest drafted Husker to pass on professional baseball and return to school the following season in 30 years.

After a junior year that saw Leise hit .371 with 12 home runs, 51 RBIs and 25 stolen bases, his head was no doubt persuading him to sign a pro contract and start working his way to the big leagues. Instead, Leise's heart brought him back to Lincoln for his senior season and the pursuit of a third consecutive College World Series berth.

Money apparently wasn't a huge consideration for Leise. By returning to college as a senior, Leise realized fully that he'd be losing a bargaining chip with the professional clubs.

"I knew that if I came back, there was a good chance I wouldn't get as much money as I could have last year," Leise said. "It was something I definitely thought about, but when it came down to it, I didn't want to make it a money thing."

"I've loved my time here and felt like it was something I couldn't give up."

Nebraska Coach Mike Anderson said he was obviously thrilled when he found out that Leise was coming back.

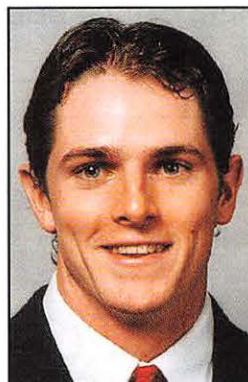
"When Jeff made that decision last summer, I knew what kind of impact that was going to have in February and March and for our season the second that he made it," Anderson said. "Knowing the type of young man he is, not only as an athlete but as a student, too, I knew that he would be a great role model for this team and a lot of our young guys that are coming in."

Catcher John Grose said no one was more excited than him to hear of Leise's return.

"I love having Leise out there," Grose said. "A lot of guys may think he's a quiet guy or whatever, but if you see him out there tracking fly balls down during (batting practice), he is punching the wall because he just missed one or jumping off the wall trying to catch it."

"He's the most intense, competitive guy you'll every meet. He wants to win so bad."

Anderson hopes Leise can pass those qualities on to the young Husker players.



Jeff Leise started his senior season with a .356 career average.

"One of the biggest transitions these young men make from high school baseball to junior college baseball to Division I is not having a full understanding of what Big 12 baseball is all about," Anderson said. "It's a different level, so to have guys like Jeff showing the young guys the extra things they need to do has been vital. It's been huge for us."

Leise said he's trying to be more of a leader than in past seasons.

"I'm a senior. I've been through it for three years, and I know what to expect," Leise said. "I try to help guys out in that way, but also, I've got to be myself. I can't try to force anything."

"I try and show up every day, work hard and just try to show the guys that it takes hard work and that they've got what it takes to win."

Leise has played a major role in Nebraska reaching the CWS the last two seasons. He hit .380 as a sophomore in 2001, has a career average of .356 and ranks among NU's top-10 all-time in hits and triples.

"I think he's one of the best hitters in the Big 12 if not the nation," Grose said. "That's huge getting that guy back. He's a great player and a great teammate."

So, does Leise have the ability to hit .400 this season?

"Absolutely, I wouldn't doubt it," Grose said. "His swing is the same every time, and he just hits the ball hard every time. You just wonder to yourself how a guy that size can hit with that much power and create that much bat speed, but he does it every time. He's a real impressive guy to watch at the dish."

Leise believes hitting .400 is possible for anyone in college baseball. It's just a matter of consistency, he said.

"Last year, I was above .400 for a lot of the year and kind of fell off at the end, but that's something I'd definitely like to do," Leise said.

After a slow start this season, Leise was hitting .357 with four triples, two home runs and 10 RBIs through his first nine games. He also had walked seven times.

More importantly to Leise, the Huskers got off to a 7-2 start and climbed to as high as No. 12 in one national poll. Despite what some may have thought, Leise said he knew Nebraska would have enough talent to make another run at the CWS.

"We have an unbelievable team," Leise said. "We have a lot of guys retuning, and the guys that are new here have a lot of talent. One through nine, this is as solid a lineup as we've had since I've been here at Nebraska, and our pitching staff is real deep this year."

"Talent-wise, it's probably the best team I've been on since I've been here. I have high expectations for this team, for sure. ■

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Tough Times

Opposing coaches say Nebraska basketball teams will get things turned around



Curt McKEEVER

IT'S COLD in the Bob Devaney Sports Center these days.

For the first time ever, the Nebraska women's basketball team finished by itself in last place in the conference standings. The Huskers went 0-8 at home in conference play.

And things didn't go much better for the Husker men. Although they went 3-5 in the Devaney Center, coach Barry Collier's third NU team also finished last in the league stand-

ings for the first time in 40 years.

Is there hope on the horizon?

There is if you listen to a couple of Sooners.

"Connie's got 'em playing," OU women's coach Sherri Coale said of Nebraska's first-year coach Connie Yori. "They play hard, the compete. They play like they think they're going to win, and that's huge."

Coale should know. She guided Oklahoma to the national championship game last season, her seventh with the Sooners. Her first year with Oklahoma, the team won just five games and, like Yori's first club, went 1-15 in the Big 12.

"Connie Yori's going to get the job done at Nebraska. You can write that in the paper," claimed Drake Coach Lisa Stone, who spent the previous two seasons prior to this one competing against Yori's teams at Creighton.

"She's going to get it done. Her kids play hard. Sure, they're depleted in numbers, but they compete, and they give effort."

Like the Husker women, who were without Keasha Cannon, the Nebraska men were missing one of their best players this season.

Collier's team was 8-5 entering its conference opener at Kansas. That's when sophomore Jake Muhleisen suffered a broken hip socket, and for the rest of the season, the Huskers looked like a broken record. They were seriously challenged to find ways to score.

Oklahoma Coach Kelvin Sampson sympathized with his long-time friend Collier.

"When Quannas came back from the Big 12 all-star tour this summer," Sampson said of his senior point guard Quannas White, "I said, 'Quannas, who do you think was the best player on that trip?' The guy that surprised him the most as the best player he wasn't aware of was Jake Muhleisen. Quannas said, 'Coach, that kid is good.'"

"When Jake went down in January, that was a big loss for Nebraska. He was the guy who keeps them together. Their three guards are good. (Brennon) Clemmons, (Nate) Johnson and (Corey) Simms are solid, but what they lack is a guy like Jake Muhleisen. Quannas is that for us. I can't imagine what we'd be like without Quannas. He's our glue guy."

Sampson and Collier took similar routes to becoming major college coaches, and often crossed paths as assistants in the Pac-10 Conference. That would explain the empty feeling Sampson experienced when the Sooners cruised to a 76-51 win

over Nebraska the final week of the regular season.

Before that game, he called on NU fans and administrators to remain patient.

Like a true friend, Sampson declined to say if it was easy for him to detect Collier's frustration during phone conversations they'd had recently. Or whether Nebraska's coach is feeling more pressure to get things going. But he sounded like he expected Collier to eventually produce a big turnaround.

"Barry has a firm grasp of who he is and what he is as a coach. He took over a program that needed to be revived and rebuilt, and it's not going to happen overnight," Sampson said.

"There are some programs you can take over — like if something happens at UCLA and there's a new coach — that can be turned around quickly. Nebraska is not a UCLA. It's not going to be turned around quickly. I think Barry understands that."

"He shouldn't feel any pressure. A key player was lost. It's a process, so I think Barry's on target. Obviously, he'd be doing a lot better had that kid not gone down. There's nothing he can do to control that. (But) an older coach with experience can handle this situation much better than a young coach who doesn't have experience."

Collier, meanwhile, took a no-excuses stance over Nebraska's fourth straight losing season.

"We took a detour this year, and we expected to be better in the conference," he said . . . "Our whole focus is to work hard today, execute our plan, and stay on the task. We are stubborn to the point of refusing to accept that we can't get it done. We will get it done."

The Huskers should look to Colorado as an example. The Buffaloes' last trip to the NCAA Tournament was in 1997. They entered this season picked to finish ninth in the Big 12, then finished in a tie for fifth. Colorado, which hadn't produced a winning record at home against Big 12 competition the previous two seasons, went 8-0 in the Coors Events Center this year.

"He's taken a team with no talent, no recruiting base, no nothing, and turned it into a contending team in the Big 12," sophomore center David Harrison said of CU Coach Ricardo Patton. "It's an amazing thing. It comes from his defensive mentality and his ability to use our strengths. He knows the game. I think he deserves to be coach of the year."

Patton acted embarrassed by that proclamation, but he did acknowledge the challenge of his position.

"Looking at the history of Colorado basketball, I don't know that you can say it was going to take a short period of time to build," he said. "Our kids have gotten older, our talent level has gotten better."

Yori and Collier can only hope the same phenomenon occurs at Nebraska. ■



Barry Collier's third team finished 3-13 in the Big 12.

Curt McKeever is a sportswriter, covering the University of Nebraska for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football he is the primary beat writer for the men's basketball and baseball teams.



SPRING PREVIEW

STORIES BY MIKE BABCOCK

Spring

Solich making significant changes in structure of program

The Nebraska football team will return to traditional uniforms this season, including solid red punts with white jerseys on the road and vice versa at home. Some things shouldn't change.

Some things should, however, following a 7-7 record, the Cornhuskers' worst since 1961. So Coach Frank Solich is making significant changes in the structure of his 5-year-old program.

When spring practice begins on March 26, much will be different. There will be six new full-time assistant coaches, of course. There will be new terminology. There will be new philosophies on defense and offense. And there will even be a new structure for meetings and practices.

In this case, change is good. "I think it's the wise thing to do," Solich said. "I've been associated with only one system. But these coaches, many of them, have been around several systems."

Even though all but one of the new assistants have been associated with Nebraska either as players or coaches, they are "used to operating in a certain manner," said Solich.

"I want to make sure they have their best opportunity to make things work. So we're adapting and we're fitting in whatever needs to fit to make it easy on these coaches."

That's why the first of 15 practices will be Wednesday instead of the



more traditional Monday following Spring Break. That's also why the team will practice on a Sunday.

Players have already begun learning new terminology, which is "virtually across the board" on defense. And the numbering system will be different on offense, easier to learn. It is what "most of those guys used in high school," Solich said. "So they just need to revert back to that."

Some of the changes will be obvious. And some will not.

On defense, for example, the designation "strongside" linebacker has given way to "buck" linebacker. But there is more to it than that. What positions are called "is the easy part," said Solich. "What they're going to be able to do after the ball is snapped is the tougher part of it, of course."

of Change



The defensive changes include the linebackers. Playmaker Lannie Hopkins (left), a rover last season, will move to weakside linebacker, the position at which he was recruited. T.J. Hollowell (17, above) could play "buck" linebacker.

"The terminology will be a key for us to all be on the same page."

There is a sense of urgency this spring, certainly, but not so much because of the 7-7 record, according to Solich. "The added urgency, I think, comes from there being a different grouping as far as our staff is concerned and wanting to make sure we get everybody on the same page," he said.

However, "I would operate, and these coaches I'm sure are operating, in the same fashion that you would any spring. Last season is in the books, and I think you start off every spring focusing on what you can do to get your team prepared in 15 practices to be the best that they can be.

"What's in the past is in the past."

To some extent that applies to the players, who will be starting over in

some ways. The potential for change on the depth chart is greater than in previous springs.

"I think it's fair to say that," Solich said.

The new coaches have seen film of players, but they haven't had an opportunity to work with players, and "really the way to feel comfortable about a guy being a No. 1 guy at a position is to get him out there, to

work with him and to evaluate him in practices and scrimmages."

"So you're starting a little more from scratch on that end of it."

As a result, there are plenty of questions to be answered before the Cornhuskers open the season against Oklahoma State on Aug. 30. Some will be answered in the spring. Some won't be answered until two-a-days. And some won't be answered until after the season begins.

In no particular order, here are some to consider.

CAN THE BLACKSHIRTS REGAIN THEIR PRIDE?

Bo Pelini is overhauling a defense that allowed 361.9 yards and 23.9 points per game last season, and he's doing it with a degree of secrecy. "You'll see a team that will pursue extremely hard," said Solich. "But as far as the alignments and style of defense, Bo will be guarded about that. He wants as many surprises as he possibly can have for the first ball game, which all makes sense."

Nebraska's early opponents can study film of New Mexico State's offense, which Barney Cotton coordinated. But they won't be able to study film of Pelini's defense.

"So there's no sense, from our end of it, to help anybody out," Solich said.

A point of defensive emphasis during the spring will be to "make sure we're basic to the point that we can evaluate players," he said. "You want to be able to line up in some base fronts and be able to play great football or else you're talking about just running people all over the place and trying to fool people.

"You'd better play great defense to start with, from base fronts and then go from there."

That's what Pelini is "all about," said Solich.

WHERE DOES THE 'BUCK' START?

Ira Cooper is the only experienced strongside linebacker returning. But the strongside linebacker is now the "buck" linebacker, and the new name reflects a substantive change.

"What we're operating out of this year gives us a chance to go to another



Quarterback Jammal Lord rushed for a record 1,412 yards in his first year as a starter but completed just 46.6 percent of his passes.

er scheme that we'll incorporate (using) that position a little differently" than last season, Solich said.

There will be some shuffling at linebacker during the spring. Lannie Hopkins, a rover last season, will move to weakside linebacker, the position at which he was recruited.

Demorrio Williams and T.J. Hollowell rotated at weakside linebacker last season and both return. "We're not going to have Demorrio, T.J. and Lannie line up at the same spot," said Solich.

"So there will be some movement there."

Hollowell, for instance, could play "buck" linebacker.

With Barrett Ruud and Chad Sievers returning in the middle, "I think we've got a talented group of linebackers," Solich said. "So we'll want to make sure we get them positioned properly so that we've got the best three on the field . . . and get

your best back-ups positioned properly, too."

WILL IT COME TO PASS?

Cotton, the new offensive coordinator, has shown a willingness to pass on first down and he was brought in to provide Nebraska's offense with that element of unpredictability.

But "I hope the fans don't have the mindset that they're going to see the ball winged down the field every other snap," said Solich. "I keep coming back to, you've got to do something well."

What the Cornhuskers have done well for nearly three decades is run the ball. They ranked fourth nationally in rushing last season, after leading the nation the previous two seasons.

"So we know how to run the ball,



David Horne rushed for 651 yards and seven touchdowns as a true freshman, but there are a number of other I-back candidates.

and that will still be part of the game," Solich said.

"Barney showed a tendency of throwing the ball on earlier downs, and I think that's good. But you want to be able to complete a certain percentage of those before you just continue to do it because an incomplete pass is still an incomplete pass, even if you think it's great timing."

Quarterback Jammal Lord completed 46.6 percent of his passes last season (95-of-204), well below what Solich would like. "You want to hit at least 55 percent and ideally, you'd like to get it up to 60 percent," he said. "Your really good throwing teams are there."

WILL LORD BE IN CHARGE?

This question can probably be answered now. Yes, barring injury, the senior-to-be will again direct the offense, following a season in which he broke the school record for rushing by a quarterback, with 1,412 yards and eight touchdowns. Lord carried 251 times and averaged 5.6

yards per carry.

His passing was the concern, of course, but other factors entered in. "We didn't have it coordinated well enough between the quarterback and line in terms of execution," said Solich.

"The quarterback gets a lot of blame. That position takes a lot of it because it's so recognizable. He's got the ball right from the very snap and something good or bad is going to happen.

"So the credit goes to the quarterback one way or the other."

Lord earned the confidence of the coaches last season, at times displaying talent equal to the best college quarterbacks in the country, according to Solich.

"Jammal did some great things," he said. "Jammal's been improving as a thrower through his career here. And I imagine that you'll see improvement from last season to next."

To ensure his continued good health, Lord again will wear a green practice jersey to signify to defenders that he is not to be tackled. At

least, "most likely" he will, said Solich.

WHO'S THE MAN AT I-BACK?

There will again be an abundance of scholarship I-backs, headed by sophomore-to-be David Horne. Ideally, one would assert himself during the spring, Solich said. But that might not happen.

Horne was second on the Independence Bowl depth chart, behind senior Dahrran Diedrick, and followed, in order, by Josh Davis, Cory Ross, Marques Simmons and Robin Miller.

Miller "really had an excellent spring last year and then injuries kind of set him back a little bit," said Solich, while Simmons "probably had a better spring than he had fall camp, so it can change.

"But you would still like to see somebody come out and just dominate that position."

Oh yes, DeAntae Grixby would like to return to I-back from fullback in the spring, too. ■

SPRING NOTES

More About Spring Football

FASTEST HUSKER

Fabian Washington ran the 40-yard dash in 4.47 seconds in post-winter conditioning tests to tie Willie Amos for the fastest time ever on FieldTurf. Washington shared the record only briefly.

Dusty Stamer, a transfer from South Dakota who attended Southeast Community College last year, finished the day's testing by running the 40 in 4.44 seconds.

Stamer also had the fastest 40 in pre-testing 4.49 seconds.

The coaches "know I can run fast," he said. "Now, I've got to show them I can play."

Stamer, who is from Grand Island, Neb., where he was the 100- and 200-meter Class A state champion as a high school senior, played running back at South Dakota. He rushed for a school-record 1,034 yards — more than twice the previous record — and seven touchdowns as a freshman.

In the Nebraska Shrine Bowl all-star game following his senior year at Grand Island High, he rushed for a record 189 yards and scored three touchdowns. "I'd love to run the ball," he said.

But at 5-foot-8 and 180 pounds, he might be better suited to play wide receiver or defensive back.



F. Washington

but depending upon how much progress he makes between now and the first day of spring ball will dictate exactly what we'll be able to do with him.

"We've been really pleased with his progress up to this point."

Cornerback Willie Amos, who missed last season with a knee injury, also might be involved in the spring.

"His rehab has been coming along better as of late, so we're hoping that will be the case," Solich said. A final determination would be made the day of the first practice, at the earliest.



Willie Amos

STILL ON DEFENSE

Jared Helming, who was hampered by injury last season after redshirting, will remain a defensive lineman. There was some consideration given to moving him to the offensive line.

"You turn on high school film and he really excelled as an offensive lineman as well as a defensive lineman," said Solich. "But you start to spread guys out a little differently with the new schemes."

"So we're going to keep him as a defensive lineman."



Jared Helming

INCOGNITO SIDELINED

Offensive lineman Richie Incognito will miss some of the spring for violating unspecified team policy. However, "I wouldn't use the word 'suspended,'" said Coach Frank Solich. "We've got to get to where some issues are taken care of and once they are, he'll be part of things again."

Incognito, the starting left tackle last season, will move to center, replacing John Garrison.

"It's a key position for us, and he has the ability," Solich said of the 6-foot-3, 305-pound Incognito. "He has the strength."

He has the drive and determination to be an excellent player there."

Incognito worked at center with the top units during his red-shirt season.

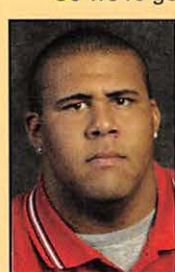
DUKES TO PRACTICE, AMOS MAYBE

Initially, it appeared that freshman quarterback Curt Dukes would miss spring practice because of a knee injury. But "we think that he'll be able to get practices in," said Solich.

"He may not be able to have contact early,



Curt Dukes



S. Ewvaraye

Seppo Ewvaraye, another young lineman who has been plagued by injury during his brief career, also might have ended up on the offensive side of the ball early on. Ewvaraye had a shoulder scoped and is "coming along fine," Solich said. "He just had a little irritation there."

"It'll be right around the starting time that he should be cleared to go."

Ewvaraye might miss "a practice or two," said Solich.

SCHEDULE CHANGES

The Cornhuskers' game at Southern Mississippi has been moved from Sept. 20 to Sept. 25 in order to accommodate a Thursday night telecast on the ESPN cable network. Nebraska agreed to switch after replacing a home game against San Jose State on Sept. 27 with one against Troy State on Oct. 4.

"We are pleased to play a nationally televised contest on ESPN," Athletic Director Steve Pederson said. "It will be an electric atmosphere and will give us great exposure."

Nebraska would not have gotten that exposure with a Saturday game, he said.

Southern Mississippi had refused to switch the game to Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City.

Kickoff for the game in Hattiesburg, Miss., will be 6:30 p.m. ■

Nebraska's 2003 Schedule

(Times and Television TBA unless noted)

April 19 Red-White Spring Game, 12:30 p.m. (no TV)

Aug. 30 Oklahoma State

Sept. 6 Utah State

Sept. 13 Penn State

Sept. 25 @ Southern Mississippi, 6:30 p.m. (ESPN)

Oct. 4 Troy State

Oct. 11 @ Missouri

Oct. 18 Texas A&M (Homecoming)

Oct. 25 Iowa State

Nov. 1 @ Texas

Nov. 8 @ Kansas

Nov. 15 Kansas State

Nov. 28 @ Colorado (ABC)

Dec. 6 Big 12 Championship, Kansas City (ABC)

'Right Weight'

Maintaining speed, mobility key as Herian adds weight

When Matt Herian went to get fitted for a tuxedo for a cousin's wedding recently, his mom noticed he was bigger than he had been when he left for his freshman year at Nebraska.

He was a good 25 pounds heavier than in the late summer — he was listed at 6-foot-4 and 215 pounds in the Cornhuskers' media and bowl guides — and 15 or so pounds heavier than when he went home for semester break following the Independence Bowl game.

By the time he reports for two-a-day practices this summer, he expects to be even heavier. Providing he can maintain his speed and mobility, he would like to weigh as much as 250 pounds.

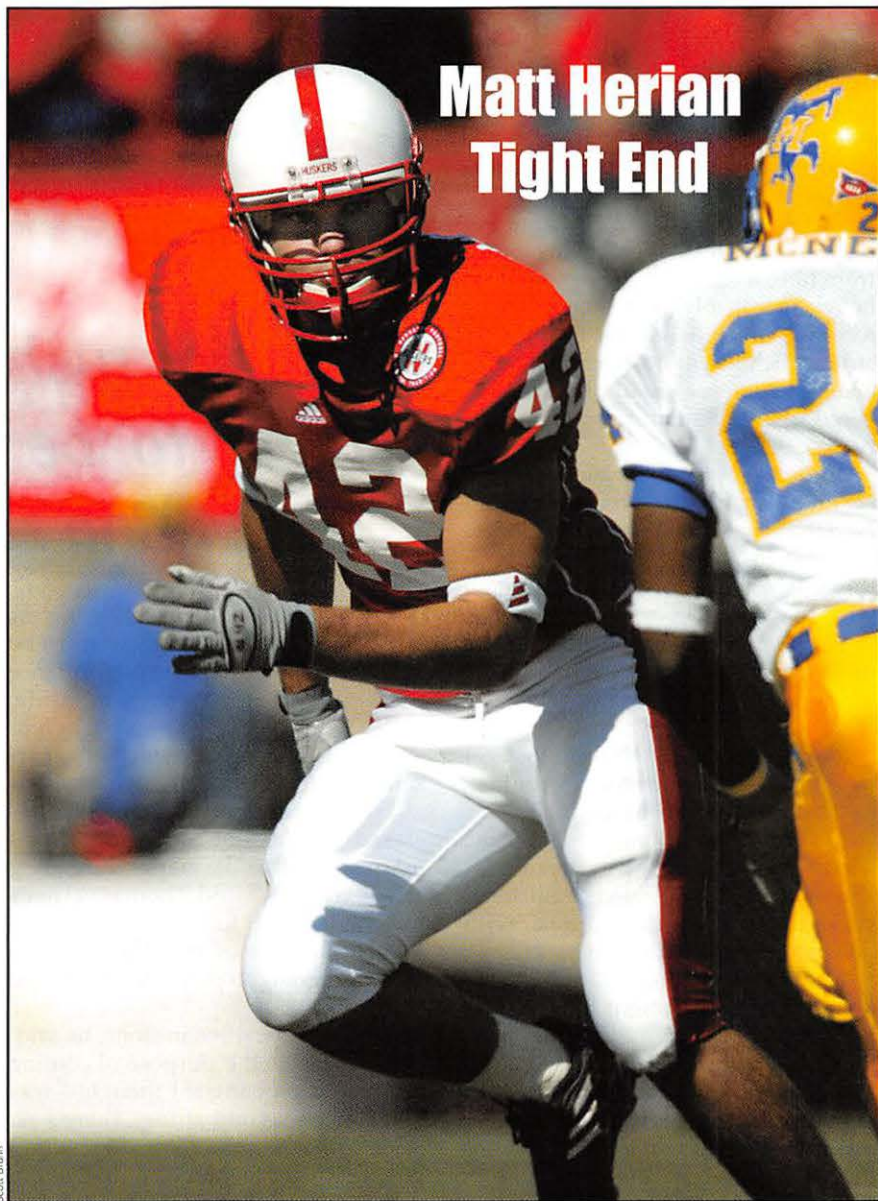
Spring practice will provide a gauge "to see how the strength stuff is coming for me, how, hopefully, my blocking can improve, how everything pans out for all of the tight ends," he said.

Ah, blocking, that's the ticket for the soft-spoken Herian, who had a remarkable first season during which receivers coach Ron Brown said he would become a "household name, not only in Nebraska but probably across America" before his Cornhusker career was finished.

Herian can be "one of the great ones," said Brown.

The sophomore-to-be from Pierce, Neb., seems almost embarrassed by such praise. "I guess it puts a little pressure on me," he said. "I always wanted to be one of the best tight ends; that's what every player strives for, kind of dreams of. So there's a little pressure. Then they (coaches) say stuff."

Coach Frank Solich also predicted a bright future for Herian, more than once.



**Matt Herian
Tight End**



SPRING PREVIEW

"I've just got to do my part," Herian said. "Hopefully, it will come true."

Such predictions are supported by ample evidence. Herian, one of five true freshmen who played last season, expected to redshirt, and sat out the opener against Arizona State, despite suiting up. He made his first appear-

ance against Troy State and caught his first pass against Utah State.

That first reception, with 14:55 remaining in the second quarter, was good for 33 yards and a touchdown. Before the season was over, he would catch six more passes, three of them for touchdowns: 60 yards against Texas, 80 yards against Colorado and 41 yards against Mississippi.

Only one of his seven receptions gained fewer than 28 yards, and his 43-yard average would have shattered the school single-season record had he met the minimum of 10 catches.

Even if he hadn't gained a yard on

three more receptions, he would have broken the record (26.81) set by Tracey Wistrom in 1999. His 301 receiving yards were the most-ever by a Nebraska freshman.

Johnny Mitchell, also a tight end, set the previous record (282) in 1990.

That's the kind of company in which Herian will find himself when his Cornhusker career is finished, if he can improve as a blocker. "That was probably my weak point last year," he said.

"They had to put me on the back-side of plays a lot."

Being on the backside of running plays meant they were going away from him, a tip-off to the defense that he was probably in the game as a receiver, which makes his four quick-strike touchdowns even more remarkable. The defense should have anticipated the potential for play-action passes.

Improvement as a blocker is a function of "aggressiveness," said Herian. "That's the main point. I kind of came in a little tentative because this was my first year. I didn't know what to expect.

"You've just got to come out and be more aggressive, make the first hit."

He's confident he can develop as a blocker. "I think a lot of it's mental, getting in the right mindset, just get after them, make sure you do your job as hard as you can," he said.

Determination alone won't get the job done, however. As was the case for Wistrom, he will need additional strength and weight to deal with defensive linemen and linebackers.

The "right weight," he said, not the kind of weight he might have put on from relative inactivity when he went home after the bowl game. "I didn't know," he said. "I kind of wanted to take a break from everything, so I sat around, didn't do much, played a little basketball every once in a while.

"I think I learned my lesson when I came back for winter conditioning."

Bottom line, "I did get out of shape a little," he said.

Getting back in shape didn't take long. The conditioning was intense, and players responded enthusiastically, he said. "Everybody says it's night and day better than the last few years."

If he feels sluggish with the additional weight in the spring, he'll be concerned because speed is what has gotten him on the field. "That's pretty much the only reason I played," he said.

He was being modest. There was much more to it than that. ■

Staking a Claim

Junior rush end Thomas ready to 'be the man' after frustrating redshirt season

Bo Pelini has made it clear that starting jobs must be earned. Past performance has been set aside. Nebraska's new defensive coordinator has wiped the personnel slate clean.

Nevertheless, Benard Thomas has staked his claim at rush end. "If you ask me will I be the starter, I'm going to tell you yes," said Thomas. "That's the way I've got to look at it until the depth chart comes out. I'm going to start. I'm going to play a lot. I'll be the man."

Nothing is written in stone, he said. "But it defeats the purpose of coming out here competing if I thought I was going to be second string. There's no sense of playing the game if you don't go into it with the mindset that you're going to start. I'd be stupid if I didn't (think that)."

Thomas isn't among the eight returning players who started on defense in the 2002 Independence Bowl game. He hasn't started a game at Nebraska, for that matter.

The junior from East Palo Alto, Calif., didn't even play last season.

He was healthy a year ago. That wasn't the problem. He suited up for the opener against Arizona State and participated in warm-ups, as the No. 3 rush end on the left side. But he changed into street clothes before the kickoff and watched from the sideline, as he would all season long.

"I decided to go ahead and red-



shirt," said Thomas.

He had been contemplating sitting out to preserve a season of eligibility. "It didn't look like I was going to get a bunch of playing time from the situation on the depth chart," he said.

He was listed behind seniors Chris Kelsay and Justin Smith.

Thomas saw only limited action as a sophomore in 2001, with seven tackles in 10 games, after playing as a true freshman, one of only four — all on defense — in the 2000 season.

The others were Willie Amos, Terrell Butler and T.J. Hollowell.

Thomas was taken from a redshirt after the season began and played sparingly in six games.

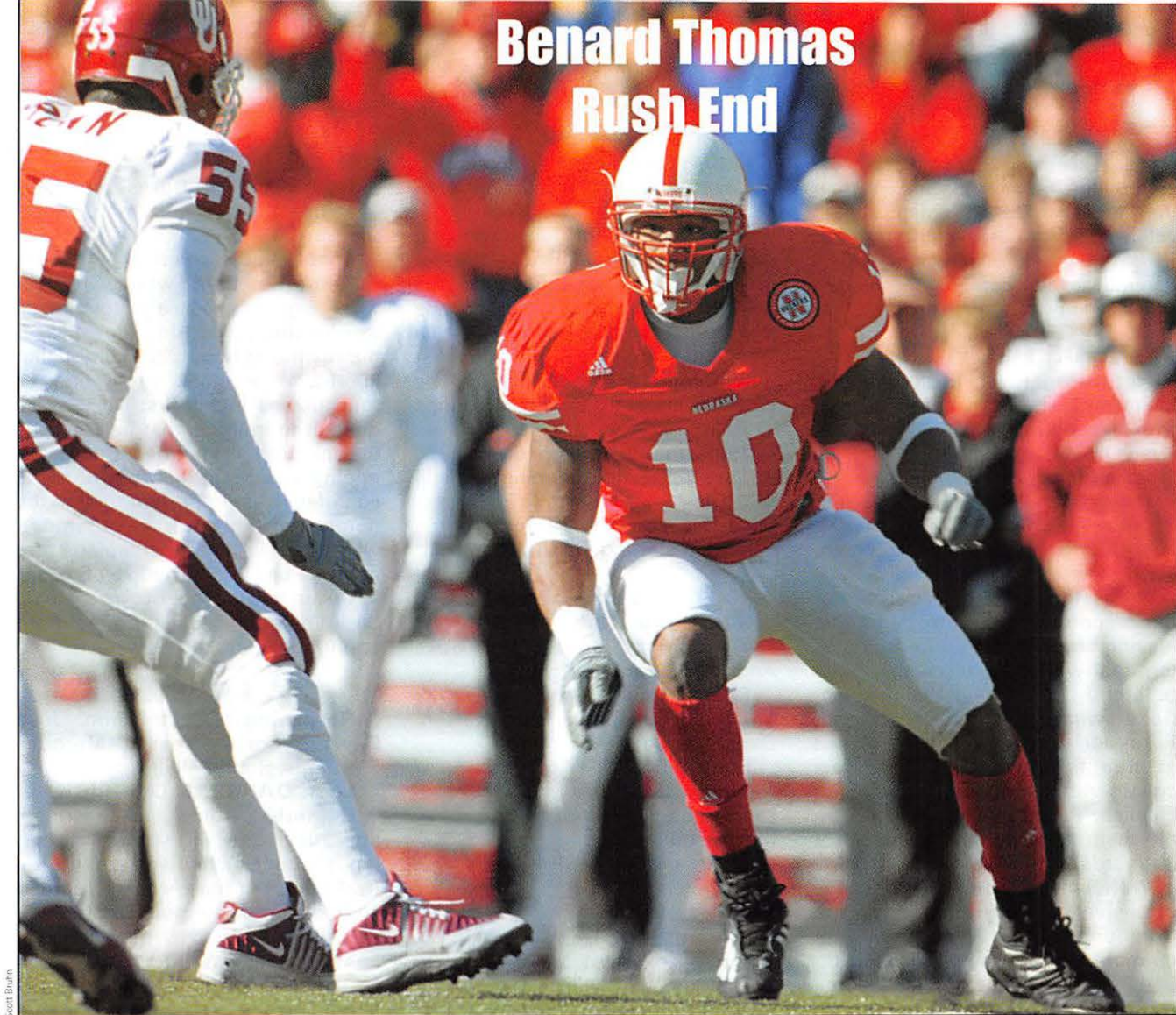
Those first two seasons were understandably frustrating, but probably not as frustrating as last season. As an athlete, "that's the worst thing I've ever had to do, to be perfectly healthy, to be fine, and still have to sit there and watch, when there's nothing wrong with me," he said.

It was "by far, the toughest thing I've had to do in sports."

Pride was a significant factor for the 6-foot-4, 270-pound Thomas, who earned SuperPrep All-America recog-

Benard Thomas

Rush End



Benard Thomas was a senior at St. Francis High in Mountain View, Calif.

"Hanging out with the people you bleed and sweat with and you don't get a chance to play, that hurts," he said. "This is what you always wanted to do. It's tough mentally."

Most players will consider a red-shirt season as valuable after it is finished. Not so Thomas, however. His season on the sideline had little value. He didn't learn much. "Mental toughness, that's about it, a learning experience on how the world works," he said. "But as far as football, no."

What did he learn about how the world works?

"When things get tough, you've got to be yourself and do what you've got to do," he said. "I know all the famous clichés. I've got to be me and do what I need to do."

What he needs to do now is assert himself during the spring, at a position with only one returning starter, Trevor Johnson, and no appreciable experience after that.

Thomas has shown big-play poten-

tial, reflected in limited statistics to date. Six of his nine tackles have been for losses, including a sack of Iowa State's Seneca Wallace for a 24-yard loss.

"I'm a different type of a defensive (rush) end compared to the defensive ends of the past," Thomas said. "They were more stereotyped as just big, push people out of the way."

"I bring speed and power to the game. It's not going to be strictly one or the other."

The same is true of Johnson, according to Thomas.

"Me and Trevor are going to bring both," he said.

Thomas also brings a hard edge, which has him predicting that the defense will be "causing all kinds of trouble" during spring practice. "Helmets will get knocked off," he said, including Johnson in the defensive havoc he foresees. "Trevor Johnson is going to be mean and nasty."

Those who question whether Thomas will ever be able to play at the

level most expected when he signed a letter of intent motivate him. "Everybody that's doubting me, everybody that's talking about me and whatnot, bring 'em on," he said. "When you prove them wrong, it's fun."

"It's fun when you get to do what they thought you couldn't do. It's good if everybody thinks you can do it. But it gives you something more to work for if they think you can't."

Thomas has a focus that was sharpened during his redshirt season.

"I'm not from Nebraska. I didn't come here just to be on the team," he said. "I didn't come here just to get some nice jerseys and apparel. I came to win. I'm about business. I came to play."

"If I'm not doing that, it's tough. It's just as simple as that."

Thomas understands where he stands going into the spring.

"Right now, nobody has a position; there are no starters," he said.

In his mind, however, he is. That's the only approach he can take. ■

SPRING PR OFFENSE

Note: Except in a few instances, "returning" indicates players listed on the Independence Bowl depth chart, with starters indicated by BOLD CAPS. Redshirts include scholarship recruits. Parentheses indicate games started last season by returning players.

WIDE RECEIVERS

Returning: Ross Pilkington, Mark LeFlore, Tim Liley, Kiffin Wigert, Mike McLaughlin, Jack O'Holleran, Ryan Ommert

Redshirts: Isaiah Fluellen

Other: Ben Zajicek, Ronnie Smith
Lost: WILSON THOMAS, TROY HASSEBROEK, Ben Cornelsen, John Klem

Remarks: The top three wingbacks completed their eligibility, leaving ample opportunity in a system that will utilize receivers a little differently, discarding the designations wingback and split end. Pilkington and LeFlore both played as true freshmen, and there was consideration given to playing Fluellen. Pilkington was second on the team in receptions, with 14 for 301 yards.

With Barney Cotton taking over as offensive coordinator, the Cornhuskers are likely to throw a little more, and in less predictable situations. In order to do that, some receivers must step up.

TIGHT END

Returning: Matt Herian, Phil Peetz

Other: Chris Septak, Alex Shada, Trevor Neeman

Lost: AARON GOLLIDAY, Kyle Ringenberg, Jon Bowling, Will Dabbert

Remarks: Four of the top five are gone, but Herian provides a solid base, after catching four touchdown passes as a true freshman to establish himself as a big-play threat. Herian needs to improve as a blocker, however. Peetz, who appears to have finally settled into a position, has shown he can block but he needs to develop as a receiver. Septak has been hampered by injuries throughout his career.

Neeman, who enrolled for second semester, could play rush end instead.

TACKLE

Returning: DAN VILI WALDROP (13), Nick Povendo (2)

Redshirts: Jemayel Phillips, Cory Timm

Other: Chris Loos, M.J. Flaum
Lost: Scott Koethe, Nate Kolterman

Remarks: Richie Incognito, a returning starter, will move to center, leaving a job open. Povendo was the swing tackle last season. Loos is trying to come back from a serious knee injury. Coach Frank Solich dismissed Internet rumors that Phillips had left school for personal reasons in February.

"Big Smooth" weighed in at 370 prior to winter conditioning and still ran the 40-yard dash in 5.37 seconds. He could be a force, even earning a starting job in the spring.

GUARD

Returning: MIKE ERICKSON (14), Junior Tagoa'i (1), Jake Anderson, Brandon Koch

Redshirts: Jermaine Leslie

Other: Tim Green, Brian Nelson, Gary Pike, Cody Volk

Lost: WES CODY

Remarks: Leslie, who suffered a knee injury late in the season, had the strength and savvy to play without redshirting. He even suited up early because of that possibility. Green has yet to play because of back problems, but he was able to participate in Independence Bowl practices.

Erickson is a fixture, and Tagoa'i was the swing guard. Tagoa'i started the Independence Bowl game because Cody was sidelined by injury. Anderson also saw considerable action against Mississippi.



Mike Erickson

CENTER

Returning: RICHIE INCOGNITO (13), Josh Sewell

Redshirts: Kurt Mann

Other: Jack Limbaugh

Lost: JOHN GARRISON, David Kolowski

Remarks: Incognito is the front-runner to start after moving over from tackle. But he will miss time during the spring for running afoul of team policy. Mann will benefit from the maturity of a season spent on the scout team. Sewell has limited experience, playing in just five games a year ago.

QUARTERBACK

Returning: JAMMAL LORD

(14), Mike Stuntz

Redshirts: Curt Dukes

Other: Garth Glissman, Scott Siefken

Lost: Joe Chrisman

Remarks: Lord, who will again wear a green practice jersey, needs to continue to develop as a passer during the spring, after completing 95-of-204 for 1,362 yards and 12 touchdowns in his first season. It's difficult to imagine that he could be unseated as the starter. But determining a back-up in whom there is confidence is important given the number of times during a game in which Lord is at risk, particularly running the ball. He carried 251 times.

Dukes will be able to participate on a limited basis. It's an important spring for Stuntz.

I-BACK

Returning: David Horne, Josh Davis, Cory Ross, Marques Simmons, Robin Miller

Lost: DAHRRAN DIEDRICK

Remarks: Horne has the edge, after rushing for 651 yards and scoring seven touchdowns as a true freshman. But there's still a scholarship logjam at the position. In addition, DeAntae Grixby has indicated he would like to return to I-back from fullback. Cotton will be looking for imaginative ways in which to get more than one in this group on the field at the same time. Miller had the best performance index in pre-winter conditioning testing, an indication that he hasn't conceded anything.

FULLBACK

Returning: JUDD DAVIES (13), *Steve Kriewald, DeAntae Grixby

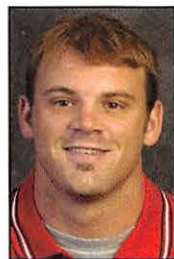
Redshirts: Grant Miller, Dane Todd

Other: Andy Wingender

Lost: Paul Kastl

Remarks: With the top two returning, and Miller and Todd coming off redshirts, the Cornhuskers should be set. Davies was used a little less in the running game last season, after averaging 6 yards per carry as a sophomore. How Cotton plans to utilize the fullbacks will be interesting.

Kriewald will miss the spring following ankle surgery.



Judd Davies

PROSPECTUS

DEFENSE

RUSH END

Returning: TREVOR JOHNSON (9), Tyler Toline

Redshirts: Benard Thomas, Jay Moore, Adam Carriker

Other: Jeff McBride

Lost: CHRIS KELSAY, Justin Smith, Demoiné Adams

Remarks: Johnson, second on the team in quarterback hurries with 15, was tied for third in tackles-for-loss, with 11 for 40 yards in losses and 3.5 sacks. Much was expected of Thomas when he signed a letter of intent after earning SuperPrep All-America honors as a senior at St. Francis High in Mountain View, Calif. The decision to redshirt Trevor Johnson



Trevor Johnson

Moore wasn't made until a couple of games into the season. He and Carriker could earn their way into the mix during the spring.

TACKLE

Returning: RYON BINGHAM (14), Patrick Kabongo (7), Le Kevin Smith, Titus Adams

Redshirts: Brandon Greeson

Other: Seppo Ewvaraye, Jared Helming

Lost: JON CLANTON

Remarks: This is one of the deepest areas on the team. It could be even deeper if Jason Lohr succeeds in gaining another season of eligibility. Greeson, Ewvaraye and Helming all have been hampered by injuries, which could limit them during the spring. Smith and Adams have the skills to play rush end if need be. Adams practiced some at rush end last season.

BUCK LINEBACKER

Returning: Ira Cooper (1)

Lost: SCOTT SHANLE

Remarks: The "Buck" has replaced strongside linebacker, and the position will change some, too. Cooper got the call in the Independence Bowl game because Shanle was ill. Obviously, some new names will appear on the depth chart during the spring. T.J. Hollowell could move over. Incoming freshmen Bo Ruud and Corey McKeon will get a good look in the fall. McKeon also could play the weakside. New linebackers coach Jimmy Williams will do some adjusting.

MIDDLE LINEBACKER

Returning: BARRETT RUUD (14), Chad Sievers, Steve Safranek, Curt Tomasiewicz

Remarks: Sievers suffered a season-ending knee injury against Kansas. If he can get healthy, he'll join Ruud to provide a solid duo in the middle. Hollowell also could move into the middle if need be. Ruud was second on the team in tackles with 91, including 12 for losses — second on the team to Kelsay. He also was credited with 13 quarterback hurries and forced two fumbles.



Barrett Ruud

WEAKSIDE LINEBACKER

Returning: DEMORRIO WILLIAMS (11), T.J. Hollowell (2), Chad Buller, Lannie Hopkins

Remarks: Williams should show the positive effects of a season's experience. Junior college transfers typically need a little time to settle in. Even so, he led the team in tackles, with 92, including 38 unassisted and six for losses totaling 24 yards. He shared the starting job with Hollowell, who is versatile enough to play any of the linebacker positions. Buller contributed on special teams.

Hopkins is moving back to linebacker, the position at which he was recruited.



D. Williams

CORNERBACK

Returning: FABIAN WASHINGTON (11), Pat Ricketts (8), Lornell McPherson (4), Willie Amos, Terrell Butler, Kellen Huston

Other: Fred Thorne, Kade Pittman

Lost: DEJUAN GROCE

Remarks: Groce's starting position will be up for grabs. Washington goes into his first spring with experience under fire. He started the last nine games and held up despite opposing teams' inclination to attack him by way of avoiding the veteran Groce, who he tied with four interceptions. Washington led the

team with 13 pass break-ups. The hope is Amos will be ready at some point.

The secondary has a new coach in Marvin Sanders, so the approach could change, another reason spring practice should be interesting.

SAFETY

Returning: *PHILIP BLAND (13), JOSH BULLOCKS (5), Jerrell Pippens, Daniel Bullocks (1), Shane Siegel (1)

Redshirts: Andrew Shanle
Other: Brett Lindstrom, DeWayne Long

Lost: Aaron Terpening

Remarks: Sanders would seem to have plenty with which to work here. Bland, who was involved in 84 tackles last season, is a proven player among a group of experienced safeties. He'll miss the spring. Siegel moves from cornerback, where he played the "penny" in passing situations. The terminology has been adjusted here, too, with "strong safety" replacing "rover."

PUNTER

Returning: KYLE LARSON (14), Sam Koch

Remarks: Larson was second-team All-Big 12 according to the conference coaches, after averaging 43.2 yards on 73 punts to rank among the nation's top 10. In addition, he backed opponents inside their own 20-yard line 23 times.



Kyle Larson

PLACE-KICKER

Returning: Dale Endorf, Sandro DeAngelis

Lost: JOSH BROWN

Remarks: DeAngelis, a scholarship player is coming off an injury that sidelined him last season. Endorf seemingly came out of nowhere to kick field goals of 33 and 49 yards against Colorado after Brown was suspended. DeAngelis kicked two field goals and 15-of-16 extra-points in 2001.

*Solich has indicated these players will definitely miss spring practice while recovering from injuries. Several other players will miss or be limited in what they can do, but that determination won't be made until just before the first day of drills, according to Solich.

Worst is Over

Husker guard Muhleisen says he won't 'rush into anything' in recovering from hip injury

By Mike Babcock



Jake Muhleisen had to learn to get around on crutches after his injury.

Early in the week of the Nebraska basketball team's final home game against Iowa State, Jake Muhleisen was able to set aside one of his crutches — the right one.

He also moved back to the third-floor apartment he shares with high school friend and teammate Barrett Ruud. "I don't know what he did when I wasn't there," Muhleisen said.

"I think he enjoyed having the whole place to himself."

Because of the problems posed by negotiating the stairs, Muhleisen lived at home for six weeks, after suffering a fractured hip socket in the first half of a 33-point loss at Kansas.

At the instant he went to the floor, after a drive to the basket, he had no idea of the implications for his sophomore season. His immediate response was to get up and shoot the free throws. When he tried to pull himself up, however, he experienced "the worst pain I've ever had," he said.

That pain would be his constant companion for the next two weeks. It would throb even when he sneezed. And when he'd try to roll over in bed, "it would kill," he said.

The problems associated with learning to walk with crutches, something he had never had to do, further

complicated the situation, as did February snow in Lincoln.

Getting around then would have been difficult enough without crutches. Never mind the handicapped parking sticker that allowed him to get closer to the buildings in which he had classes. Wet hallways could become slippery, if not treacherous, for a novice at walking with crutches.

But Muhleisen endured the hardships with equanimity untypical of one his age. He didn't withdraw, which well he might have. He continued in his role as the Cornhuskers' captain, leading the team in stretching and offering encouragement and advice from the bench.

He was always at practice, going through his rehabilitation, riding a stationary bicycle after swimming in the Devaney Sports Center pool for the first half-hour or so.

He missed only one road trip even though getting up and down the steps as well as working his way through the aisles and into the seats of small charter aircraft could be difficult. He didn't go to Missouri because of a test an instructor wouldn't allow him to make up.



Scott Brown



Jake Muhleisen encourages his teammates from the sideline.

He felt "helpless" on the bench, wanting "be out there so bad." But he didn't allow that to show because his teammates might have gotten discouraged seeing him down, he said.

The worst is over now. The season, with the frustration associated with it, has ended. And Muhleisen has set aside the other crutch. Within the next month, he expects to begin running.

He's not going to push his rehabilitation schedule, however. "I want to make sure everything heals so I won't have any problems when I'm 40 years old," he said. "That's the main thing."

"I'm not going to rush into anything. But I should be playing full-speed in the summer."

If he can without jeopardizing his future health, there might be reason for optimism in a program that has struggled through three consecutive losing seasons under Coach Barry Collier.

Muhleisen, of course, is encouraged by what he has seen. "Oh, definitely, I think we'll have a great season next year," he said. "I want to make sure all of us are working hard this summer, make sure we have a good

year, so there are no excuses at all. We're going to work, play a lot together."

He'll set the example, if the injury allows him to do so, as he did last summer. No one worked harder than he did, a fact reflected by his being elected captain as a sophomore.

In his capacity as captain, he spoke briefly to the crowd of 9,801 at the Sports Center for the Iowa State game, reminding Cornhusker fans how much they were appreciated.

"Obviously, when you're losing, the fans don't like it," he said. "I just wanted to make sure they knew we were thankful for them coming out and supporting us every night. They're some of the greatest fans in the country, by far. I just hope they come out next year and support us."

His role in stretching was to "stand there, tell them what to do and count," Muhleisen said.

One day during the week before the Iowa State game, however, he joined his teammates, only briefly of course. But, after a month and a half, he "felt kind of normal for once," he said. ■

Men's Basketball

Final regular-season record 11-18 overall, 3-13 Big 12

Nov. 21	*Centenary, W 68-45
Nov. 23	*Alaska-Fairbanks, L 64-61
Nov. 24	*Ball State, L 73-65
Dec. 1	Texas-San Antonio, W 69-53
Dec. 5	@ South Florida, L 65-60
Dec. 8	Minnesota, W 80-60
Dec. 14	IPFW, W 63-46
Dec. 21	Creighton, L 81-73
Dec. 27	#UC-Santa Barbara, W 60-57
Dec. 28	#Arizona State, L 75-63
Dec. 31	E. Washington, W 63-60
Jan. 4	Denver, W 79-75 ot
Jan. 7	Lipscomb, W 70-60
Jan. 11	@ Kansas, L 92-59
Jan. 15	Texas A&M, L 53-52
Jan. 18	Colorado, 80-77 ot
Jan. 22	@ Kansas State, L 77-53
Jan. 25	@ Iowa State, L 71-61
Jan. 29	Missouri, L 63-56
Feb. 1	Kansas, L 81-51
Feb. 5	@ Texas Tech, L 75-49
Feb. 12	Oklahoma State, L 77-70
Feb. 15	Texas, L 75-63
Feb. 18	@ Missouri, L 67-50
Feb. 22	@ Baylor, L 78-64
Feb. 25	Kansas State, W 68-61
Mar. 1	Iowa State, W 69-63
Mar. 4	@ Oklahoma, L 76-51
Mar. 8	@ Colorado, L 84-69
Mar. 13-16	@ Big 12 Tournament, Dallas, Texas

*Top of the World Classic, Fairbanks, Ala.
#ASU Hoops Classic, Tempe, Ariz.

Women's Basketball

Final record 8-20 overall, 1-15 Big 12

Nov. 22	Grambling State, W 63-40
Nov. 24	Rice, W 71-56
Dec. 1	@ Creighton, L 55-40
Dec. 5	Drake, L 63-55
Dec. 9	Texas Southern, W 71-48
Dec. 11	Cal State-Fullerton, W 78-60
Dec. 15	Cincinnati, W 65-55
Dec. 22	New Orleans, W 73-62
Dec. 28	*San Diego, W 62-61
Dec. 30	*Penn State, L 83-64
Jan. 5	Texas-Pan American, L 61-58
Jan. 11	Oklahoma, L 57-43
Jan. 14	@ Colorado, L 74-54
Jan. 19	Kansas State, L 88-54
Jan. 22	@ Missouri, L 65-53
Jan. 25	Iowa State, L 58-53
Jan. 29	@ Kansas, L 67-64
Feb. 1	@ Oklahoma State, W 73-59
Feb. 5	Baylor, L 69-44
Feb. 8	Missouri, L 64-53
Feb. 12	@ Kansas State, L 64-47
Feb. 15	@ Texas A&M, L 69-54
Feb. 19	Kansas, L 62-58
Feb. 22	@ Texas, L 86-54
Feb. 26	Texas Tech, L 50-35
Mar. 1	@ Iowa State, L 62-57
Mar. 5	Colorado, L 70-56
Mar. 11	& Oklahoma, L 71-51

*Surf & Slam Hoop Classic, San Diego
& Big 12 Tournament, Dallas, Texas

AIM SHOTS

Notes And Quotes From The Basketball World

FRUSTRATING FINISH

The Nebraska women's basketball team finished a frustrating season with a 71-51 loss against Oklahoma in the first round of the Big 12 Tournament in Dallas.

Frustrating? The loss was a school-record 10th in a row for Coach Connie Yori's team, and the 20th of the season, with only eight victories — including just one in conference play.

The Huskers' problems weren't all that surprising. "We had a lot of limitations this year," Yori told the Lincoln Journal Star of her first season at Nebraska.

"We knew the day we started conditioning, we had some major holes."

After Yori succeeded Paul Sanderford, five players either left on their own or were dismissed, and the situation was aggravated when Keasha Cannon was sidelined by a medical condition. Then in an upset up No. 25-ranked Cincinnati, Katie Morse suffered a season-ending knee injury.

Without Morse, the Huskers lost 18 of 21 games and finished last in the Big 12, at 1-15.

Morse will return next season, as will Alexa Johnson, who received all-conference honorable mention, and several other key players, among them Jina Johansen, the team's assist leader, and Margaret Richards, who expects to be granted an additional season of eligibility.

Also, Cannon is expected to return.

Greichaly Cepero, Amanda Cleveland, Shahidrah Roberts and Laura Pilakowski were seniors.

Despite the losses, the Huskers never quit competing. "I want to commend our players for continuing to play hard throughout the year," Yori said following the tournament loss.

"We never gave up, not in this game, and not this year. Our players stuck with it, even though they had a lot of obstacles to overcome and a lot of reasons to throw in the towel. They just kept battling, and they should be commended for that."

REMINDER OF BETTER TIMES

Conference-area media representatives predicted a last-place finish in the Big Eight for Nebraska in the 1990-91 season. The prediction was reasonable. The Cornhuskers had finished seventh in each of the previous three seasons, and their overall record in 1989-90 had been 10-18.

The prediction was also wrong, of course. Nebraska finished third. More to the point, however, the Cornhuskers won 26 games and were nationally ranked for 14 consecutive weeks.

The 26 victories, against only eight losses, were a school record.

Among those victories, the one that indicated the pre-season predictions had been off the mark, was one against Michigan State in late November at the Devaney Sports Center.

The Spartans, who came to Lincoln ranked No. 5 in the Associated Press poll, fell 71-69 on a 3-point shot with only 3 seconds remaining. Beau Reid, a senior, hit the shot.

Reid, who has his own insurance company in Lincoln now, was inducted into the Nebraska Men's Basketball Hall of Fame on the weekend of the final home game against Iowa State.

Reid is the third member of the 1990-91 team to be so honored. Rich King was inducted in the 2001 class. And Clifford Scales was inducted in last season's class.

Reid was this year's only Hall of Fame inductee. George "Butch" Lindley received the Bud Cuca Special Merit Award and Milton "Bus" Whitehead was the first to be honored with the Distinguished Hall of Fame Alumni Award. Whitehead (1948-50) was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1990.

Reid, who came from Lancaster, Ohio, scored 976 points during his Cornhusker career.

Nebraska, a No. 3 seed in the NCAA Tournament, lost its opening-round game against Xavier and finished with a No. 9 ranking by the coaches and a No. 11 ranking by the AP.

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

Nebraska was excluded from the Big 12's player-of-the-week and rookie-of-the-week honors until the next-to-last week of the regular season, when Nate Johnson earned the latter.

The junior transfer from Penn Valley, Mo., Community College, scored a combined 35 points in back-to-back home victories against Kansas State (68-61) and Iowa State (69-63). He also pulled down eight rebounds against Iowa State, and hit 4-for-4 free throws in the final 18.4 seconds.

The last time a Cornhusker had been named Big 12 rookie of the week was during the 1999-2000 season, when Kimani Ffriend, also a junior college transfer, earned the honor.

FINISHING IN STYLE

Brennon Clemmons, the Cornhuskers' only senior, made the most of his final appearance at the Devaney Sports Center. Even though he scored only three points, he grabbed a team-high nine rebounds and had a team-high seven assists, two of which were in critical situations.

The first game on the final play of the first half, when he stole the ball and passed it to freshman Jason Dourisseau for a breakaway dunk to tie the score at 34.

The second came with 12:48 remaining in the game, on a lob pass to John Turek, who slammed the ball through the goal to give Nebraska a 44-42 lead, which it never relinquished.

As the only senior, Clemmons addressed the team before the game. But he didn't say much. "I'm a man of short words," he told reporters afterward. "I show it rather than talk about it."

COULD HAVE BEEN WORSE

The Cornhuskers struggled through a nine-game losing streak in conference play, but avoided the school record for consecutive losses in a season by defeating Kansas State.

The record is 10 consecutive losses, in 1944-45 and again in 1962-63 — when Coach Jerry Bush's final Nebraska team finished with a 1-13 conference record, the worst in school history.

The school record for consecutive losses overall is 13. Coach Charles T. Black's 1931-32 team finished with six losses and Coach William H. Browne's 1932-33 team opened with seven.

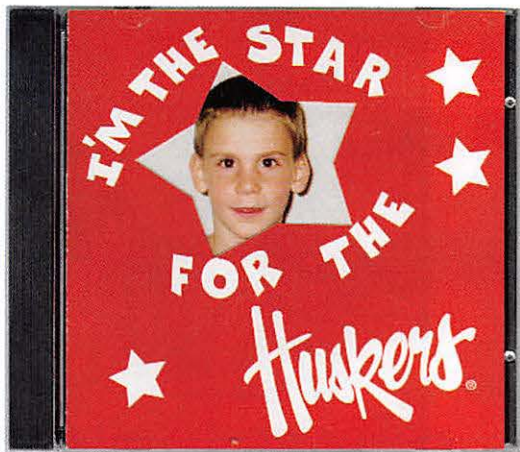
Collier, however, remained undaunted.

"We took a detour this year," he said late in the season. "We expected to be better in the conference. We are stubborn to the point of refusing to accept that we can't get it done. We will get it done."

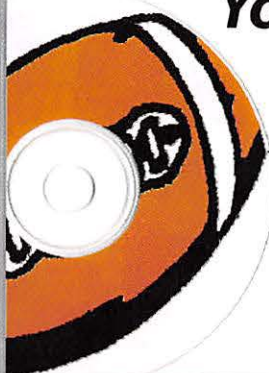
"I think our team certainly deserves credit for fighting the whole year." ■



Junior Alexa Johnson averaged 14.8 points and 6.8 rebounds.



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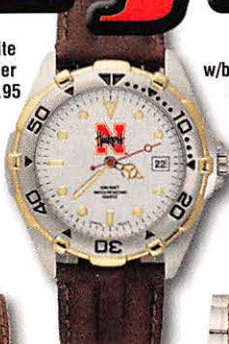
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'You Can Make It'

Huskers were fortunate to find left-handed pitcher Marsden in North Dakota

By Mike Babcock

That Aaron Marsden is pitching for Nebraska is a matter of good fortune, initiated by chance and dependent on the networking that is a part of intercollegiate athletics.

Cornhusker pitching coach Rob Childress was in Mandan, N.D., to watch the state's American Legion Tournament three summers ago, and specifically Phil Shirek, a high school junior from Minot.

Shirek is a sophomore at Nebraska now.

Not knowing when Shirek would pitch, Childress arrived early, accompanied by Andy Sawyers, a former Cornhusker and volunteer assistant who was preparing for his first year as head coach at Hutchinson, Kan., Community College — Sawyers is a Nebraska assistant now.

While waiting for Shirek to pitch, they watched Marsden pitch his Grand Forks team to a victory against Jamestown. The way Marsden remembers it, he pitched "OK."

Though Sawyers would later describe the tall left-hander as very raw, he and Childress were impressed. The problem was, Marsden had signed a letter of intent with North Dakota. In less than a

month, he was going to enroll in the NCAA Division II school in his hometown.

Because Marsden had signed, Childress couldn't talk to him. But Sawyers could.

After the game Sawyers talked to Marsden's dad, and a couple of days later he called Aaron to say he was interested. Plus, he said, if Aaron was successful at Hutchinson, he could end up at Nebraska.

The decision to pack up and go to school 11 hours from home was difficult, even without such short notice. But the possibility of moving on to Nebraska was too attractive to pass up.

"Nebraska, that was my goal," Marsden said.

The Cornhuskers maintained contact with him during the summer following his freshman season at Hutchinson. His numbers weren't spectacular, a 6-3 record with a 5.90 earned-run average. But they were decent, particularly when taken in context — Marsden is 6-foot-6 and 225 pounds.

A left-hander with that size and a decent fastball has a bright future.

Despite Nebraska's interest, Marsden was uncertain what he would do. He pitched for the Beatrice Bruins and "didn't have the greatest



summer," he said. "But I was learning."

"I didn't know if I was going to come here or go back to Hutch."

He continued to waver until late in the summer. Like his decision to go to Hutchinson instead of North Dakota, "it was real spontaneous," he said.



Aaron Marsden was chosen as the Big 12 Newcomer of the Year and was a first-team all-conference selection his first season with the Huskers.

in mid-March, a week after pitching well in relief against Baylor, he was given a start against Texas A&M. He capitalized on the opportunity, pitching a one-hit shutout, striking out nine and walking only one.

That first start, "I guess I didn't know really what to expect, what would happen," said Marsden. "But I think that definitely was a confidence builder. Things kind of rolled after that."

With Shane Komine sidelined for more than a month because of elbow surgery, Marsden became the No. 1 starter, going 5-0 in six series-opening starts, with a 1.53 earned-run average.

Although he struggled some late in the season, he finished with an 8-1 record and 2.70 ERA. He allowed only 80 hits in 100 innings, striking out 75 and walking 40. He was chosen as the Big 12 Newcomer of the Year and was a first-team all-conference selection.

Childress was a significant factor in his development. "Coach Childress is a great teacher of the game," Marsden said. "He teaches us so much philosophy besides mechanics."

That philosophy is based on a universal pitching truth. "You realize how important it is to get ahead, throw strike one on that first pitch, make people earn their way on," said Marsden.

The key to his sophomore season was "just understanding those concepts," he said.

"I think my first year was a big-time learning experience, understanding how walks can hurt you, how getting behind (in the count) can hurt you. You have to throw strikes and get ahead."

That wisdom was apparent in his first victory this season, 7-1 against No. 14- and No. 20-ranked Notre Dame in the first game of the Dairy Queen Classic at the Metrodome in Minneapolis. He allowed one run on five singles, striking out 10 and walking no one in eight innings.

Nebraska's pitching rotation is built around Marsden, a role with which he is comfortable. Despite his numbers, the elevation of his comfort level was "gradual" last season.

He came away from the Texas

"I think my first year was a big-time learning experience, understanding how walks can hurt you, how getting behind (in the count) can hurt you. You have to throw strikes and get ahead."

— Aaron Marsden

A&M shutout telling himself he hadn't done anything yet. "You don't want to get too comfortable," he said. "I don't know if I was super-confident."

"I felt confident, but I never felt comfortable as the (No. 1) guy."

This season, he does. "I know what to expect," he said.

With experience comes confidence.

Marsden, who carries a 3.95 cumulative grade-point average in finance, never imagined he would be where he is when he was a high school senior. He never expected to pitch at the major college level. Getting noticed by recruiters in Grand Forks or anywhere else in North Dakota isn't easy.

Former Cornhusker Darin Erstad, a key contributor to the World Series champion Anaheim Angels, is from Jamestown, of course, and major league pitcher Rick Helling is from Devil's Lake.

Travis Hafner, who also is from Jamestown, is trying to establish himself with the Cleveland Indians, after a brief stint with the Texas Rangers last season. So "if you're from North Dakota, you can make it," Marsden said. "That's kind of motivation, inspiration, whatever."

Regardless of where you're from, it takes talent. And sometimes, it takes a little good fortune.

"I feel fortunate and blessed to be here," Marsden said. ■

"Both times happened quick."

Looking back now, "it worked out better than I can ever imagine."

It worked out better than Nebraska could have imagined, too. Childress figured he was probably a season away from being a weekend starter, so he began as a reliever. But

'Stoked'



Power surge makes Husker outfielder Wangler a 'triple-threat'

By Todd Henrichs

Lisa Wangler is *stoked*. It's the one word the quiet but always smiling NU senior uses to describe the tear she's on this season. Wangler homered five times in Nebraska's first 13 games, a pace that extended over a 64-game season would break Ali Viola's 1998 school record.

What's amazing is Wangler had not homered in more than 450 plate appearances as a college player prior to this season. Her breakthrough blast was a grand slam against Mississippi State that helped Nebraska go 5-0 at the season-opening Fiesta Bowl Tournament and quickly established the Huskers as a national-title contender this season.

"I was trying to get lift and trying to get a solid hit, but shoot, I didn't know it was going to be that," Wangler said in describing her first career home run.

She followed that up with a homer against Cal State Fullerton and two in the same game with Oregon State. Home run No. 5 in eight days came against California, last year's national champion. The Huskers won that game 6-1.

With a batting average of .432 and a team-high 20 RBIs — six more than she had all of last season — you'd

Senior Lisa Wangler hit five home runs in Nebraska's first 13 games, including a grand slam against Mississippi State.

expect Wangler's confidence to be soaring. But such pride and self-assurance hasn't been the norm in her winding collegiate career.

Wangler started in the junior college ranks close to home in Arizona, hitting better than .500 during her only season at Mesa Community College.

In her one year at Oregon, Wangler set the Ducks' single-season record for hits, led the team in runs scored and stolen bases and won most valuable player honors from her teammates.

But what no one knew was Wangler's confidence was sagging. She'd been utilized only as a slap-hitter in Oregon's slap-happy approach to offense.

By the time she transferred to Nebraska for her junior year, Wangler was questioning everything. She credits her NU coaches and teammates for turning things around.

"They needed to work on my confidence," Wangler said, her easy-going outward appearance admittedly a mask to what goes on in her head. "I always second-guess myself still, but when you have confidence from your teammates, it's a lot easier."

Coach Rhonda Revelle said Wangler has always slugged the ball out of the park in practice, but doing it in a game situation only makes the career .358 hitter a bigger problem for opposing teams.

She had nine extra-base hits through 13 games, after producing just 16 combined in the last two seasons. The majority came swinging away, a big change from last season when Wangler can remember only one big hit that wasn't a slap or bunt situation.

A left-handed hitter with great speed, Wangler now makes third basemen — in fact, the entire infield — a nervous wreck when she's in the batter's box.

"She's like a triple-threat now," said Nebraska junior Peaches James, the Huskers' pitching ace. "She can put the bunt down, she can slap and she can take it out. It was only a matter of time until she busted out."

Revelle says the renewed confidence along with hours working with hitting coach Jennifer Cline in



Lisa Wangler



Rhonda Revelle

the offseason have made the difference. Wangler's versatility makes a big difference for Nebraska offensively.

"They really made a commitment in the offseason that they were going to work on her hitting," Revelle said.

"She's always been a great hitter but now she adds so many dimensions to our offensive attack."

Nebraska, which hasn't hit better than .280 as a team since 1996, was at .337 through 13 games. The Huskers' 12-1 start matched the best in school history and their No. 3 national ranking was an all-time high for the program.

After playing in the Women's College World Series last year, Wangler's desire to make it back as a senior is as strong as her early-season numbers.

"That's what we're all playing for," she said.

You might say she's *stoked*. ■



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Hap

Former Penn State gymnast finds success, happiness at Nebraska

By Mark Derowitsch

Richelle Simpson didn't enjoy her first season of college gymnastics. She was so unhappy that, after spending a year at Penn State, Simpson decided to leave Happy Valley in search of greener pastures.

"When I wasn't happy, I realized I wanted to do something about it," she said. "Coming to Nebraska seemed like the best option to me."

So, is she happy as a Husker?

"I'm very happy here," Simpson said as a big grin spread across her face.

Of course, Simpson has many reasons to feel good about the time she has spent in Lincoln. She played a big role on a Husker team that has broken the school single-meet record, scoring a 198.025 to win the Masters Classic earlier this season. The Huskers, in fact, are ranked third nationally, have been beaten head-to-head just once this season and will play host to the NCAA Championships April 24-26 at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

No wonder Simpson feels so good.

The native of Toronto has bettered her personal-best performances in each of the four events this season, and also broke the school record in the all-around with a score of 39.80. Simpson's score bettered Heather Brink's former record of 39.70, which she set in 2000. Brink, that season, won the NCAA all-round championship.

"She's been very happy here, and look what a happy athlete is capable of doing," Nebraska Coach Dan Kendig said.

Is Simpson happy enough to make a run at an NCAA all-around title?

Nebraska junior Richelle Simpson shows her form on the balance beam, where she ranks third nationally. She ranks second in the vault, seventh in floor exercise and fourth in the all-around.

ppy Husker

Kendig thinks so.

Her average score in the all-around (39.505) ranks fourth nationally, but her best score is tied for the nation's lead. She also ranks second on the vault (9.935), third on beam (9.935) and seventh on the floor exercise (9.920).

Keep this in mind: Simpson failed to record a perfect 10.0 in any event when she came through with her best day as a Husker. Earlier in the season, Simpson record two perfect scores, on the beam and floor exercise, at the same meet. She also scored a 10 on the vault.

"I think she's capable of winning it," Kendig said. "She's got as good a chance or better than anybody since the national meet is at home. But she'll be the first to tell you that she isn't worried about that. We're after higher goals, team goals."

Kendig obviously knows Simpson well.

When asked about her chances to win an all-around title, Simpson immediately began talking about the Huskers' team goals.

"It's not something that I prioritize," she said. "It's way more important to me that our team does well, that I'm able to deliver for my team. I really feel we are one of the best teams in the country and that a national title is not out of the question."

Under Kendig, Nebraska has been somewhat of a fixture at the NCAA Championships. The Huskers have qualified for the event each of the past four years, finishing among the top six teams each time.

Nebraska's best finish, however, is fourth, something the Huskers accomplished first in 1989, then again in 2000.

This year's team is so experienced that Kendig believes the Huskers can break through with a top-three finish,

especially in front of a friendly crowd.

Nebraska has plenty of experience at the NCAA meet. In fact, seniors A.J. Lamb, Jess Wertz, Julie Houk and Jen French; juniors Simpson, Tami Harris, Gina Bruce and Libby Landgraf; and sophomores Carrie Gloudemans and Jamie Saas all have performed on the national stage.

"I think we've had teams this good, they had high goals, but they didn't know if it was possible," Kendig said. "This team is a veteran team, they've all competed at the national championships before, and we're not carrying three or four freshmen along, trying to explain it to them."

"Our seniors have been to this meet three times before, our juniors the last two years and our sophomores last year. All things considered, I believe this is the team that has the potential to sit at the top of Nebraska women's gymnastics." ■

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Fourth in a Row



Frank Tolen

A third-place finish in the 1,600-meter relay was all the Nebraska men needed to win a fourth consecutive Big 12 indoor track and field championship.

Although the Cornhuskers crossed the finish line after Baylor and Texas in the meet's final event on the track at the Devaney Sports Center, they finished one-half point ahead of Texas.

Nebraska totaled 132 points, to the Longhorns' 131.5. In addition to being the Cornhuskers' fourth conference indoor title in a row, it was their ninth in the last 11 seasons.

Nebraska finished a distant second to Texas in the women's competition.

Frank Tolen, who anchored the 1,600-meter relay, was the Cornhusker men's only double-winner, taking the long jump with a 25-8 1/4 effort and the triple jump by going 53-5 3/4.

The Nebraska men's other champions were David Davis in the 60-meter hurdles (:07.70), Carl Myerscough in the shot put (68-10 1/2) and Eric Eshbach in the pole vault (18-1 3/4). Davis broke school and Big 12 records in winning the hurdles. Eshbach's vault also was a school record.

Myerscough and Eshbach both have won three Big 12 titles.

The Husker women's Ineta Radevica won both the long jump (21-1/2) and the triple jump (44-4 1/4), while Christi Lehman won the pole vault (13-3 1/2) and Becky Breisch won the shot put (56-4 1/2).

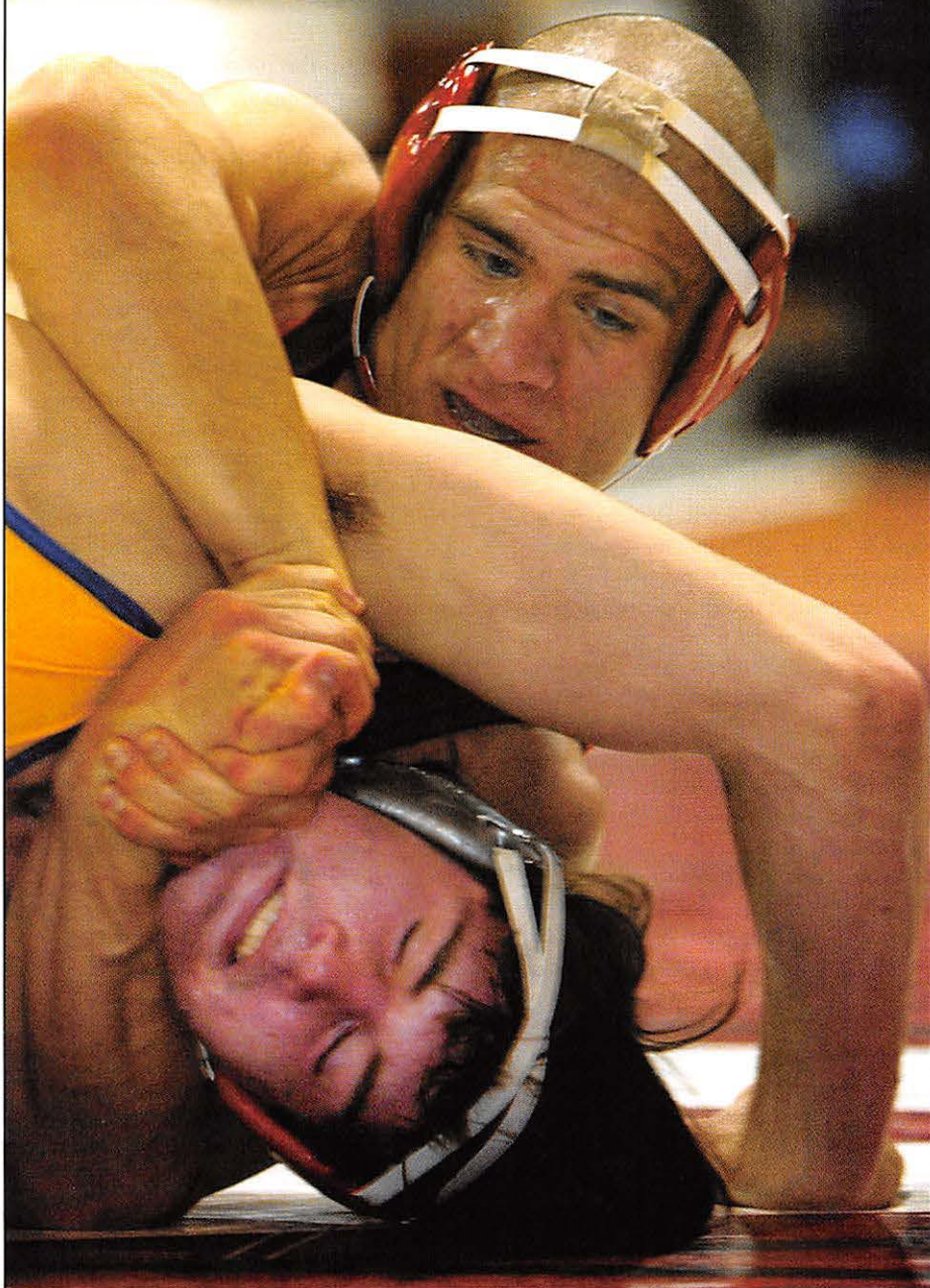
Lehman broke her own school record in the pole vault.

Tolen, the men's MVP, took the baton for the anchor of the 1,600 relay with Nebraska in fourth place and Texas leading. Baylor moved past the Longhorns to win, and Tolen enabled the Cornhuskers to climb to third and the meet victory. "I knew that everyone wanted the Big 12 cup," he said.

"I just saw the challenge present itself." ■

Scott Brown

Justin Ruiz



Wrestling

Behind six NCAA qualifiers, the Nebraska wrestling team earned a fourth-place finish at the Big 12 Championships in Columbia, Mo.

The Huskers were led by two second-place finishers — sophomores Travis Shufelt at 149 and Justin Ruiz at 197. Four other Huskers — junior Jason Powell at 125, junior Joey Malia at 133, redshirt freshman Jacob Klein at 165 and sophomore Travis Pascoe at 174 — qualified for the NCAA Championships, scheduled to begin March 20 in Kansas City, Mo.

Top-ranked and undefeated Oklahoma State captured the title with 101.5 points, easily defeating runner-up Missouri (55.5) and Oklahoma (51.5 points). The Huskers finished with 39.5 points, while Iowa State rounded out the five-team field with 26.5.

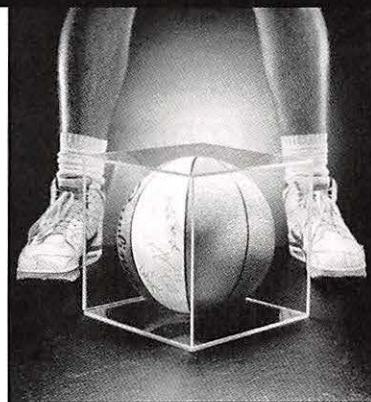
Nebraska finished the regular season with a 16-7 record. ■

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Starting on 2004

After putting the finishing touches on its 2003 class, new Husker staff looks to next year

By Doug Horwich



Scott Downing, a graduate assistant and head freshman coach at Nebraska in the mid-1980s, was named recruiting coordinator on Jan. 13. He also coaches the tight ends.

The 2003 recruiting campaign was a long and rocky road for Husker fans, who saw nearly five months pass between commitments at one point during the season.

After a rough start and extensive staff changes, Nebraska closed out its class in impressive fashion, leaving fans in anxious anticipation of what the new staff could accomplish given a full season.

New staff members Scott Downing, Marvin Sanders, Bo Pelini, Tim Albin and Barney Cotton all played active roles in putting the finishing touches on the 2003 class, and, despite having very little time with

which to work, each demonstrated that he is an effective recruiter who relates well with prospective recruits.

Recruiting is about building relationships over the long term, which is why it was impressive to see the success with which the new staff was able to secure commitments from a large number of players, some of whom had their first contact with the new coaches only weeks before national signing day.

New recruiting coordinator Scott Downing certainly has his work cut out for him. While his counterparts at most schools around the country had

already begun the process of evaluating junior prospects for the 2004 recruiting class as early as last year, Downing finds himself playing catch-up.

The Husker coaches know that time is of the essence in recruiting, and that prospects remember the schools that recruited them early, and specifically, the school that offered them first. However, these concerns have to be balanced against the dangers of prematurely offering prospects without adequate evaluation.

Nebraska does not have the luxury of programs like Texas, Texas A&M or LSU — schools that recruit primarily from within their own states. Because Nebraska's in-state talent rarely fills more than a handful of scholarship slots, the Husker coaching staff has to diversify its search and essentially utilize the entire country as its recruiting base. Given the scope of such a search, the process can be both intimidating and extremely time consuming.

Traditionally, Nebraska coaches identify an early list of roughly 100 prospects who they feel are top targets. This list is not static, however, and many of the players who make the initial list will never receive a Husker offer. Conversely, many players who don't make this initial list — either because they were initially not deemed scholarship-worthy or because the Husker staff simply didn't know about them yet — will end up receiving an offer at a later date.

The coaches are also in the process of finalizing recruiting territories and identifying areas of the country that will receive the lion's share of their focus.

Obviously, the states of the Big 12 region will receive a great deal of attention from the Husker staff. Nebraska has traditionally enjoyed a great deal of success in cherry-picking states like Missouri, Colorado, Iowa and Kansas.

Texas especially is likely to be a

Nebraska's 2003 Signees

Player	Hometown (school)	Ht.	Wt.	Pos.
Greg Austin	Cypress, Texas (CyFair)	6-2	290	OL
Andy Birkel	Lincoln (Southeast), Neb.	6-3	175	SE
Titus Brothers	Converse, Texas (Judson)	5-11	190	DB
Brett Byford	Hartselle, Ala.	6-4	290	OL
Steve Craver	Hurst, Texas (L.D. Bell)	6-2	195	FS
Joe Dailey	Jersey City, N.J. (St. Peter's)	6-1	200	QB
Donald DeFrاند	Dodge City, Kan., CC	6-2	180	CB
Darren DeLone	Mt. San Antonio, Calif., CC	6-5	320	OL
David Dyches	Spring, Texas (Westfield)	6-1	185	PK
Tierre Green	Omaha, Neb. (Benson)	6-1	195	ATH
Corey McKeon	Naperville, Ill. (North)	6-2	215	LB
Josh Mueller	Columbus, Neb. (Lakeview)	6-6	250	TE
Wali Muhammad	Coffeyville, Kan., CC	6-2	245	RE
Chris Patrick	Ithaca, Mich.	6-6	245	RE
J.B. Phillips	Colleyville, Texas (Heritage)	6-3	250	TE
Bo Ruud	Lincoln (Southeast), Neb.	6-3	210	LB
Ryan Schuler	Sioux Falls, S.D. (Washington)	6-7	270	OT
Brandon Teamer	Omaha, Neb. (Central)	6-5	265	DT
Adrain Turner	Terrell, Texas	5-10	185	DB

major focus of the Nebraska staff. With six players in the 2003 class, Texas had more players join the Husker program this year than any other state, including Nebraska.

Other states likely to receive a great deal of attention are California, New Jersey and Florida, which have all contributed vital pieces to Nebraska's championship teams of the 1990s, and which are all extremely rich in talent.

The 2004 class is likely to be a bit larger than the 2003 class, as roughly 18 scholarship seniors will be graduating, and attrition generally frees up 2-3 additional scholarships each year. The following are estimates for how the 2004 class will be distributed by position:

Quarterback

The Husker staff will definitely look to sign at least one quarterback prospect in this recruiting class and perhaps two. Jammal Lord will be in his final season. The number of quarterbacks taken in this class will largely depend on the progress made over the next year by both Curt Dukes and Joe Dailey.

I-Back

With a large number of young backs in the program, including 2003 signee Terre Green, Nebraska will probably look to sign only one I-back in this class and only if he's an elite player.

Fullback

With Grant Miller and Dane Todd having just completed a redshirt season, the coaches will look to sign no more than one fullback in the 2004 class.

Tight End

The staff did manage to sign two tight ends in the 2003 class in Josh Mueller and J.B. Phillips but will need to restock a position that is now dangerously thin. Therefore, the coaches will look to sign another two tight ends in the 2004 class, and possibly even three.

Wide Receivers

The team has a number of talented young receiver prospects currently on the roster, including Ross Pilkington, Mark LeFlore, Isaiah Fluellen, Andy Birkel and Grant

An Early Look at In-State Talent

By Rick Shaw

Here is an early look at some of the top prospects in the state of Nebraska for 2003:

Cortney Grixby, 5-foot-10, 165 pounds, defensive back/receiver, Omaha (Central) — The brother of current Husker DeAntae Grixby, Cortney is the top rated prospect in the state heading into 2003. He already holds early scholarship offers from Nebraska, Colorado, and Iowa in football. Grixby ran the fastest 40-yard dash (4.5 second electronic) of all participants at NU's summer camps last year. He also had a 38-inch vertical jump. Grixby, however, may choose to bypass college football, as he also claims an early scholarship offer from Nebraska in basketball.

"My favorite football team growing up was always Nebraska," Grixby said. "I like the tradition that they have, as well as their solid academics. I also have some friends on the team. I just don't know what sport I want to focus on in college just yet."

Dan Woodhead, 5-8, 180, running back/defensive back, North Platte — Woodhead may be the most exciting player in the state heading into 2003. As a junior, he rushed for 1,847 yards and accounted for 28 total touchdowns. Although he has yet to receive his first offer, he is getting early attention from Nebraska, Iowa, Colorado, Wisconsin, and Texas A&M.

"I ate, drank and slept Nebraska growing up," Woodhead said. "I've always wanted to go there. I also like Iowa a lot, though, as they have been showing me a lot of attention. I'd like to take my time with the recruiting process if I can."

Seth Olsen, 6-5, 300, offensive tackle, Omaha (Millard North) — A first team all-stater as a junior, Olsen is garnering a lot of early attention from Division I programs. He has already heard from more than 15 schools, including Nebraska, Colorado, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Michigan.

"My early top three are probably Iowa, Colorado, and Wisconsin," Olsen said. "I wouldn't put Nebraska out of the mix. I haven't gotten as many letters from them as I have from some of the other teams though."

Mike Huff, 6-5, 290, offensive lineman, Ralston — Another solid offensive line prospect from the state for 2003. Huff was named a first team (Class B) all-state lineman as a junior and is receiving frequent correspondence from Nebraska, Iowa, Iowa State and Northwestern. Huff was a regular (unofficial) visitor at Husker games last fall.

Zach Copple, 6-4, 275, defensive lineman, Lincoln (Southeast) — Copple was a first-team all-state defensive lineman for Southeast High in 2002. He is the son of Scott Copple, who earned a football scholarship to Nebraska as a quarterback in the early 1970s.

"It would be nice to get away for school," Copple said. "If Nebraska is the best school for me, then that's where I'll go. But, I won't hesitate to leave. I'm not tied to Nebraska."

— Other prospects to keep an eye on in 2003 include running back Brandon Gunn of Omaha Central, lineman Andrew Christensen of Bennington and defensive back Jake Galusha and fullback Keith Lloyd of Millard North. ■

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Oct. 18	Texas A&M	Oct. 25	Iowa State
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Mulkey. As a result of this depth, the team is unlikely to sign more than one or two wide receiver prospects in this class.

Offensive Line

The staff did a good job of bringing in quality line talent in the 2003 class, with tackles Darren DeLone and Ryan Schuler and guards Brett Byford and Greg Austin. However, more players are needed to bolster the depth on the line, and the staff is likely to sign another 4-5 prospects in the 2004 class. Two tackles, two guards and one center would provide much-needed depth for the future.

Defensive Tackle

With young talent such as Le Kevin Smith, Seppo Ewwaraye, Titus Adams, Brandon Greeson, Jared Helming and Brandon Teamer, defensive tackle is not an area of real need this year. However, the staff is likely to target a handful of top national prospects in the hope that they could sign one impact player at this position.

Rush End

Rush end depth was enhanced by the addition of 2003 signees Wali Muhammad and Chris Patrick, but more bodies are needed, as the team recently lost starter Chris Kelsay to graduation and is due to graduate two more rush ends over the next two years. Another 2-3 players at this position are needed in the 2004 class.

Linebackers

The staff signed two linebacker prospects in the 2003 class but will probably look to sign an additional 3-4 in the 2004 class. Nebraska has not managed to sign a Mike linebacker for two years now, and will have to make that position a priority in its recruiting efforts. However, 1-2 outside linebackers are also needed to bolster depth at both the Will and Sam positions.

Defensive Backs

With three cornerbacks signed in the 2003 class, a desperate need at the position was addressed. However, another 1-2 cornerbacks in the 2004 class would greatly enhance depth at the position. In addition, 1-2 safety prospects are also likely to be targeted this season. ■

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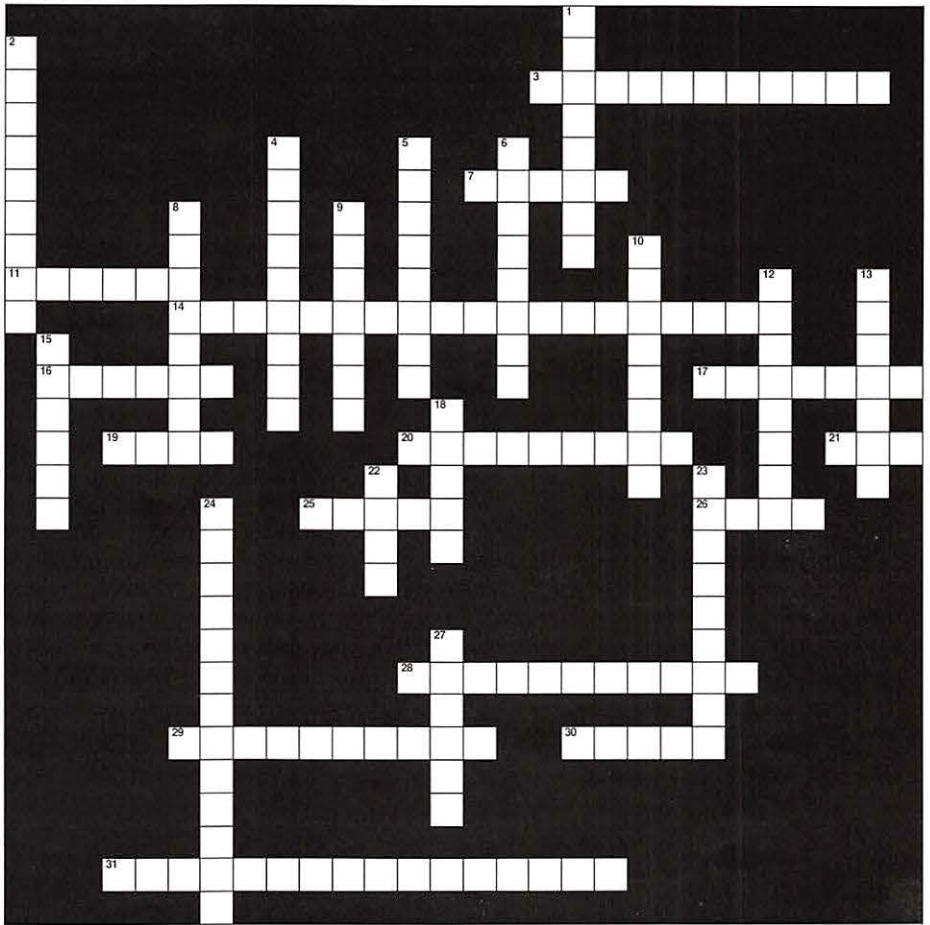
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- 3 NU defense nickname
- 7 NU's Nov. 1 opponent
- 11 1997 Outland Trophy winner
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- 16 NU tight end who played as true freshman
- 17 Head coach in 1956
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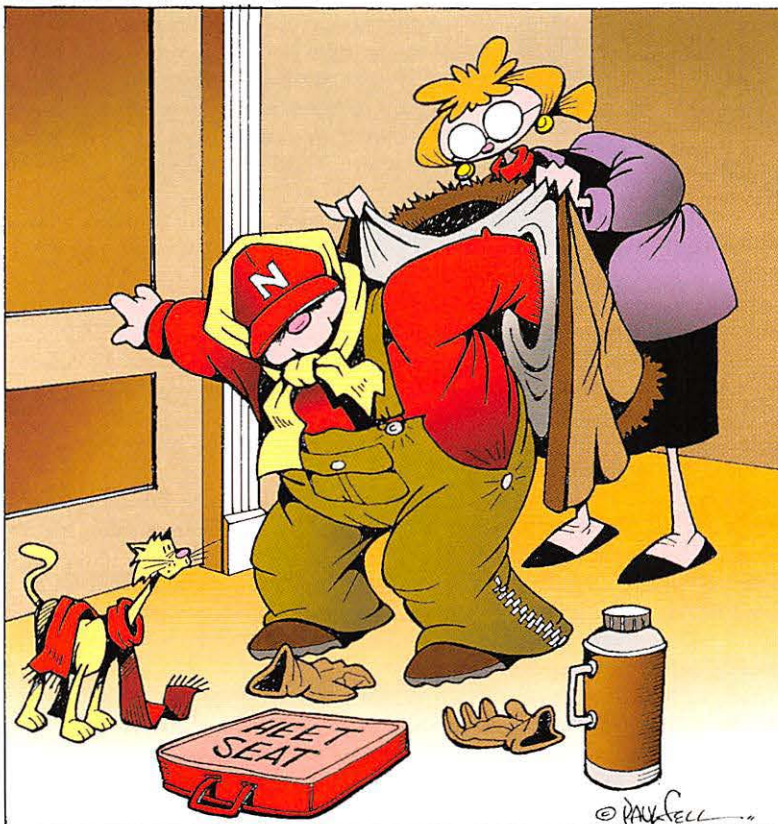
DOWN

- 1 Frank Solich's college position
- 2 NU's Sept. 13 opponent
- 4 Nickname before Cornhuskers
- 5 Head coach in 1961
- 6 NU athletic director
- 8 George Darlington's new school
- 9 1992 Outland Trophy winner
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- 12 NU's leading tackler in 2002
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- 23 Opponent recently added to 2003 schedule
- 24 Opponent in 2003 opener
- 27 NU offensive line coach

Answers in May issue



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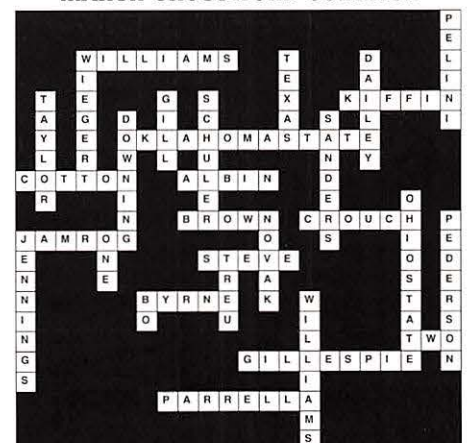
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Time Passages

A lot has changed, but some things are still the same



**Mike
BABCOCK**

PAT RICKETTS IS AMONG a handful of seniors who will be playing in the Nebraska football team's secondary this fall. As such, he's an "old guy," I told him during a recent interview.

"Old guy, that sounds weird," Ricketts responded with a smile.

Old is relative, of course. He has yet to celebrate his 23rd birthday.

Anyway, I know how he feels, and in my case there is justification. I've been covering Cornhusker football for a quarter of a century. This season will be No. 26 for me.

At Nebraska's national championship celebration in the spring of 1995, former Cornhusker Russell Gary, a safety from 1978 to 1980, told me that among his most vivid recollections of Lincoln, outside of his teammates and coaches, were Valentino's pizza and me, hanging around practice.

I took that as a compliment, coming as it did from Gary, whom I have always appreciated for being tolerant of a young reporter with questions that often fell far short of insightful.

The questions might not be more insightful now, but I have the deference of age.

I have been reminded of that age this off-season with the hiring of six new assistant coaches, including three former Cornhusker players, all of whom I covered as a reporter for the Lincoln Journal Star. Holdovers Turner Gill and Jeff Jamrog bring the number to five. Now that sounds weird.

Offensive coordinator and offensive line coach Barney Cotton, for example, was one of the first players I interviewed, meeting him in the locker room before practice one afternoon. The locker room has long since been placed off-limits. And interviews are never conducted beforehand.

Cotton seemed a bit amused by my questions, which I probably had written out in advance. He was tall, 6-foot-5 maybe, and some of his teammates nicknamed him "Scooby."

Supposedly, he resembled the cartoon character Scooby Doo. But Scooby Doo was a dog. "I think they meant the guy with the whiskers," Cotton said. That would be Shaggy. In any case, his play was no joke. He had started at defensive tackle as a junior and was a starting offensive guard as a senior.

He and All-America tackle Kelvin Clark were the left side of the line.

Secondary coach Marvin Sanders played in the late 1980s and was so gregarious that reporters often sought him out even before he became the starting free safety as a senior.

He began as a cornerback, but moved to safety after his sophomore season. He suffered a dislocated shoulder late in his final season but remained as enthusiastic as ever.

Jimmy Williams seemed to play with a chip on his shoulder. That's what I remember about Nebraska's new linebackers coach, the last of the assistants to be hired. He wasn't the easiest guy to deal with if you were a reporter because he was always so intense, so focused.

He and brother Toby walked on, if you can believe that.

Few major programs had been interested in them, in part because they couldn't send film, which had been destroyed in a fire at their high school in Washington, D.C.

I think that was it.

Anyway, Jimmy weighed about 180 pounds when he arrived at Nebraska, and wasn't particularly fast for a defensive end. But he and Toby were committed in the weight room. The story was that they would contact strength coach Boyd Epley to open it up during off-hours so they could work out.

Jimmy improved his speed dramatically through his weight room efforts, running the 40-yard dash in a hand-held 4.34 seconds, making him the fastest player on the team at any position.

A two-year starter, he was the United Press International's Big Eight "Defensive Player of the Year" in 1981 and was chosen the most valuable lineman in the 1980 Sun Bowl game.

But my most vivid recollection of him was in a nationally televised 21-7 victory at No. 11-ranked Penn State in 1980. He and Derrie Nelson, the other starting defensive end, were merciless in their harassment of Nittany Lion quarterbacks Todd Blackledge and Jeff Hostetler.

Penn State had seven turnovers, largely through their efforts.

"I think my background certainly allows me to recruit," Williams said after being introduced on letter-of-intent signing day. "There's a credibility that exists. There's an ability to communicate. When I talk about Nebraska football, I'm talking from experience, from what I've done and known."

"I'm a walking example of what the program can do in terms of impacting a person's life."

Much has changed at Nebraska since Williams finished his Cornhusker career and moved on to the National Football League was a first-round draft pick.

"When I look at the weight room, when I look at the facilities in terms of the training table, academic staff . . . you look at the stadium size, everything seems to have grown," he said.

"Coach Solich is the only person that looks the same. The guy looks good."

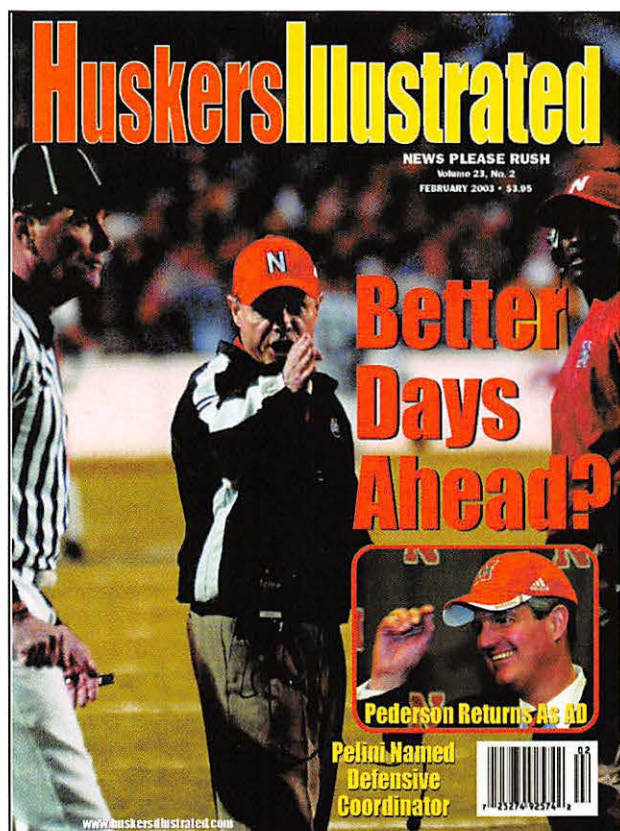
He must not have seen me, sitting to his right, in the second row. Then again, maybe he did. ■



**Jimmy Williams was a
two-year starter at
defensive end.**

Mike Babcock is a former sports columnist for the Lincoln Journal Star. He has covered Nebraska football for more than 20 years. Mike can be reached at MumblyDog@aol.com or P.O. Box 6782, Lincoln, NE 68506.

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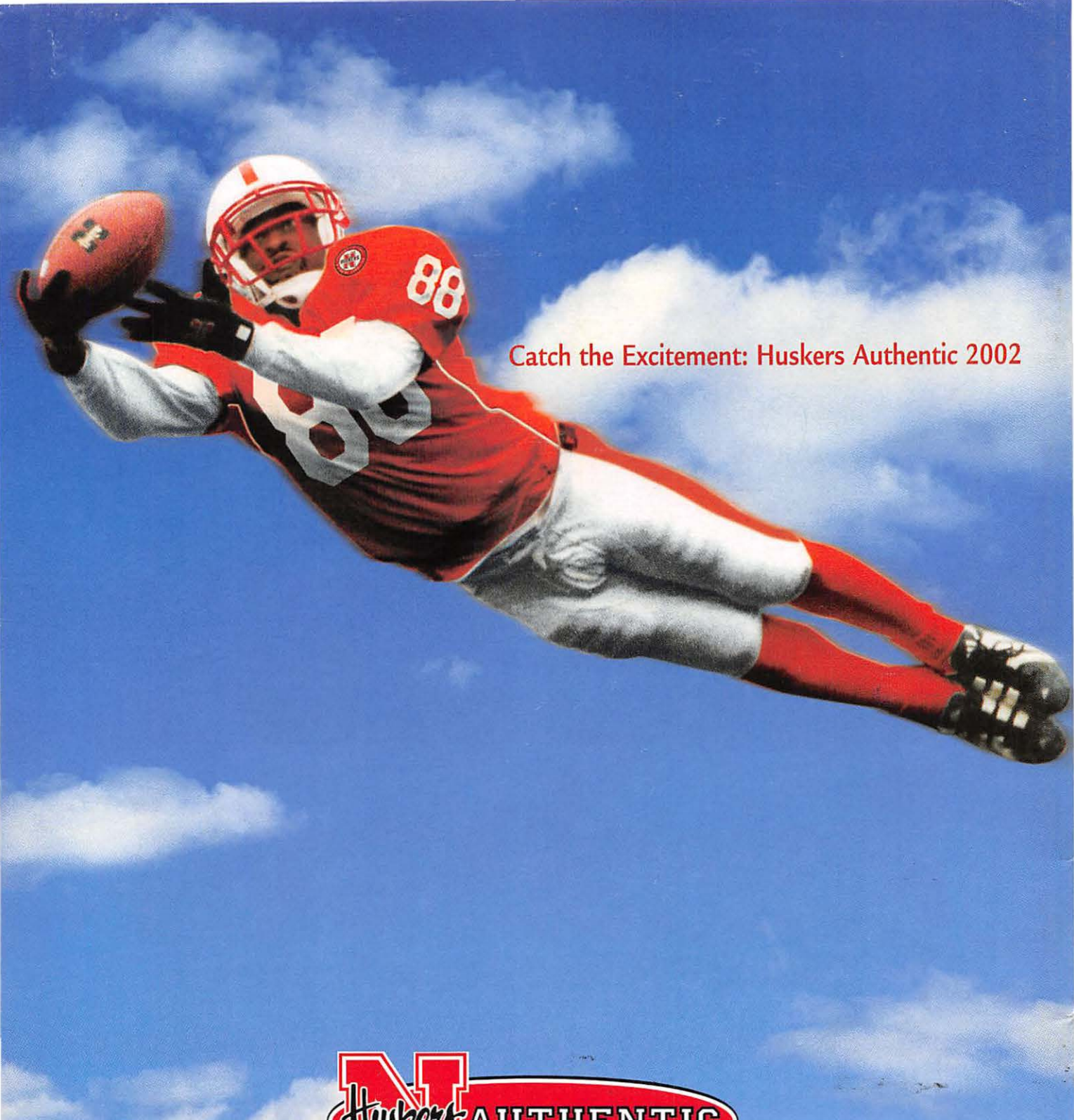
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